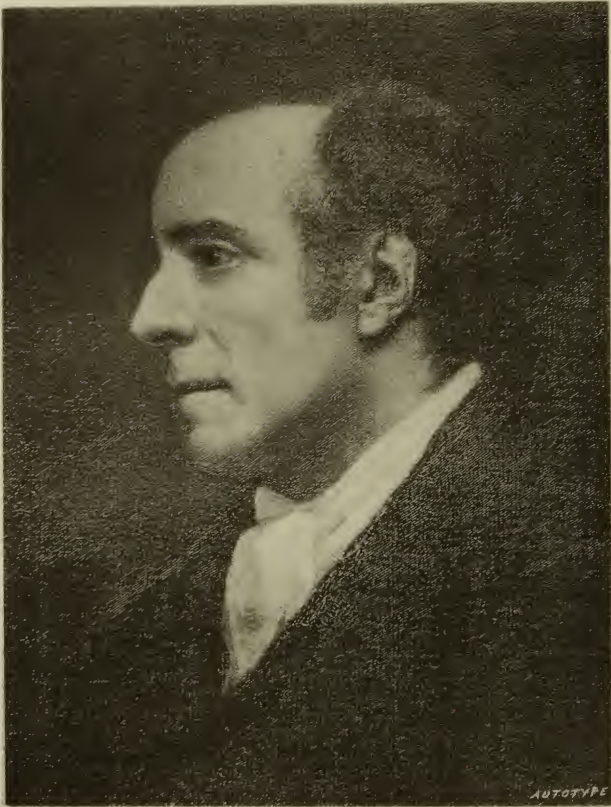


Ulrich Middeldorf

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CONVERSATIONS
OF
JAMES NORTHCOTE, R.A.



JAMES NORTHCOTE, R.A.

From a painting by himself in 1802.

CONVERSATIONS
OF
JAMES NORTHCOTE, R.A.

BY
WILLIAM HAZLITT

EDITED
WITH AN ESSAY ON HAZLITT AS AN ART-CRITIC
AND A NOTE ON NORTHCOTE

BY
EDMUND GOSSE



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PREFACE

THIS is the first reprint of Hazlitt's *Conversations of James Northcote* which has been made since the original publication of the work in 1830. The text was at that time starred with incessant initials and blank spaces, which may have offered no difficulty to intelligence sixty years ago, but which would now greatly delay the reader and distract his attention. Whenever it has been possible, these *lacunæ* have now been filled up; and in those cases when not even a conjecture can be safely formed, it is not believed that the omission will be found to interfere very much with the reader's satisfaction in following the agreeable pair of gossips.

The publisher and the editor desire to express their thanks to Lord de Tabley for his very generous offer of the unpublished portrait of Northcote, by the painter himself, now in the Tabley Park collection, an offer which they were only too glad to accept.

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HAZLITT AS AN ART-CRITIC

THE contributions of William Hazlitt to literary criticism were so numerous and prominent, and were, moreover, so characteristic of the central instincts of his nature, that they have obscured his essays in the criticism of fine art. The latter were, by their very essence, of less durable interest; they soon were superseded in their authority, and neglected as guides to taste. They were comparatively few in number, and were scattered through the series of his miscellaneous writings. They discussed modern paintings which are now of little importance to us, or else ancient paintings about which we have become far more exactly informed than Hazlitt was.

Yet if the art-criticisms of this brilliant writer are no longer of eminent value as instructors or guides to art, their function in illustrating a side of Hazlitt's own genius is not easily to be overrated. In his attitude towards plastic art, or, to speak more precisely, towards the one art of painting, Hazlitt stood alone among the prominent men of letters of his day. He had received the technical training of an artist, he had

cultivated the painter's eye in the observation of nature, and he had mastered some of the professional mysteries of the art. These were advantages which gave his written views on pictures a weight wholly wanting in those expressed, for example, by Landor or by Leigh Hunt, in whom the enthusiasm of the would-be connoisseur is lambent, perhaps, but exceedingly thin and volatile. When Hazlitt spoke of art, he spoke of that which had not merely entertained his fancy, but occupied his thoughts as a probable resource against poverty.

Before entering into any close examination of the art-criticism of Hazlitt, it will be well to see what share the practice of painting had in his education, and what traces it left on his experience. His elder brother John began to paint professionally in 1788, when William was ten years old, and John continued to make the art of miniature-painting his sole business in life until some years after the critic died. The practice of his brother, therefore, and his opinions—which we are told that he expressed freely and with good judgment—were familiar to William Hazlitt during the whole of his intellectual life. It is probable that his views were, to a great extent, those of his brother, clothed in literary language. It is to be remembered, too, that their sister Peggy was also an artist, and practised flower-painting with some credit and profit. The odour of megilp, the jargon of the studio, were in the nostrils and the ears of Hazlitt from childhood to old age.

John Hazlitt's earliest successes are now remembered entirely in connection with a precocious letter from his little ten-year-old brother at Wem. Already William is at work—"I drew eyes and noses till about a fortnight ago. I have drawn a little boy since, a man's face, and a little boy's front face, taken from a bust." For the moment, other educational interests seem to have quenched this eagerness to draw, and though we presently find him sitting for his portrait to John, we hear no more at present about his own artistic studies. But it is quite certain that the artist's eye was very early awakened in him. An instance of that optical sensitiveness has been preserved from his childish days, the language alone belonging to his mature years:—

When I was quite a boy, my father used to take me to the Montpellier tea-gardens at Walworth. . . . I unlock the casket of memory, and draw back the warders of the brain ; and there the scene of my infant wanderings still lives unfaded, or with fresher dyes. I see the beds of larkspur with purple eyes ; tall hollyhocks, red and yellow ; the broad sunflowers, caked in gold, with bees buzzing round them ; wildernesses of pinks and hot-glowing peonies ; poppies run to seed ; the sugared lily and faint mignonette, all ranged in order, and as thick as they can grow ; the box-tree borders ; the gravel walks ; the painted alcove, the confectionery, the clotted cream—I think I see them now.

This is described in a painter's hand ; the palette, with its bright pigments, seems sloping from his

thumb ; and it is an impression of infancy, trained from the very first to see things plastically and exactly.

It is supposed to have been at the age of about seventeen that William Hazlitt made that visit to Burleigh which left so vivid an imprint upon his memory. Thirty years later, in writing his *Criticisms upon the Picture Galleries of England*, he recalled this early ecstasy in a very fine piece of rhetoric : "Burleigh! thy groves are leafless, thy walls are naked!" How different, he reflects, from the aspect of this noble storehouse of art when he saw it first, when the youthful blood beat in his veins, and hope, fancy, and curiosity coloured everything with the rainbow of illusion. Hazlitt seems to have visited Burleigh again about 1803, in the midst of his apprenticeship as a practical painter. He tells us that he forgot the discomforts of a miry road as he recalled the Rembrandts which he was to see once more. "There, within those cold gray walls, the painter of old age is enshrined," he reminded his physical weariness. But the Rembrandts disappointed him. "I could hardly find a trace of the impression which had been inlaid in my imagination ;" and he proceeds, in a delightful passage, to contrast the reality which hung on the walls at Burleigh with the exquisite dream, the heightened "heirloom in my mind."

Two other fragments of experience belong to the art-training of Hazlitt's early wandering years of youth. The one was his meeting at St. Neot's with

a set of Gribelin's engravings of the Cartoons of Raphael; the second was the discovery, in an inn on the borders of Wales, of certain water-colour drawings by Westall. This must have been Richard, and not William Westall, and the paintings must have been certain of those pleasing country scenes which are still admired when the historical and sacred pictures of Richard Westall have sunk into complete oblivion. Hazlitt remained interested in this painter, though without enthusiasm, and he is introduced into the *Conversations of Northcote*.

The Cartoons produced a very different effect upon the boyish mind of Hazlitt. He often recurred to them; and he has discussed no body of artistic work more broadly or more gracefully. In 1816 he referred in these terms to the incident which has just been recorded:—

It is many years ago since we first saw the prints of the Cartoons hung round the parlour of a little inn on the great north road. We were then very young. . . . We had heard of the fame of the Cartoons, but this was the first time that we had ever been admitted, face to face, into the presence of those divine works. "How were we then uplifted!" Prophets and apostles stood before us, and the Saviour of the Christian world. . . . We knew not how enough to admire them. If from this transport and delight there arose in our breasts a wish, a deep aspiration of mingled hope and fear, to be able one day to do something like them, that hope has long since vanished, but not with it the love of

art, nor delight in works of art, nor admiration of the genius that produces them, nor respect for fame which rewards and crowns them.

It was in 1802, as his grandson surmises, that the wish, the aspiration, of which William Hazlitt speaks, took definite shape. His brother John was now practising the profession of a painter at No. 12 Rathbone Place, and thither, it is believed, William proceeded to reside as a pupil. Here and now, too, he formed the acquaintance of James Northcote, whose name he was to link so firmly to his own. Northcote was then approaching the age of sixty, and at the height of a reputation laboriously won and strenuously maintained. Northcote seems to have been interested from the first in the ardent and original young critic, whose revolutionary tendencies rather gratified than scandalised him, and whose trenchant humour was exactly to his taste. We should like to know more about the circumstances leading to William's professional study of art. So far as we can see, he was stimulated by John's example ; and Northcote is credited with having desired the lad to go to Paris, and make copies for him in the Louvre "as well as he could." Such a commission presupposes a training at home, and we are to understand that he had already served some species of apprenticeship in the studio of his brother John.

In October 1802 he started for France on the expedition which he has largely though somewhat irregularly recorded in his notes and correspondence.

He proceeded immediately to the Orleans Gallery. In later years his references to this marvellous collection were frequent. "My first initiation," he says, "in the mysteries of the art was at the Orleans Gallery : it was there I formed my taste." He used to go and look at certain favourite pictures by the hour together, till his heart thrilled with their beauty, and his eyes were flooded with tears. His first impression of the works as a whole was even more overwhelming. He was staggered, he tells us, when he saw them, and looked with wondering and with longing eyes. Scales seemed to fall from his sight, and the heavens of fine art were revealed to him. Before he went to the Louvre, he borrowed a copy of the catalogue, and "the pictures, the names of the painters, seemed to relish in the mouth." In those days there was a great deal of jealousy about the Old Masters in the Louvre, and foreigners were often excluded from them. It was a long time before Hazlitt could do more than peep at them through the door. At last, "by much importunity," he was admitted, and so escaped from what he calls "the purgatory of the modern French gallery." He sat down immediately, in the pride of youth, to copy Titian's "Hippolito dei Medici" for Northcote.

In spite of his enthusiasm, his taste was not at this time very pure. It could not, at all events, resist the appeal of a literary association, and he turned away from the Titians and the Vandykes, to what he thought "the sweetest picture" in the

Louvre, a florid seventeenth-century composition of "The Death of Clarinda." He describes this work in terms that recall the *Fables* of Dryden. In fifteen mornings—for whatever his skill he was certainly rapid—he had finished his copy of this picture, and with delightful confidence he tells his father (10th Dec. 1802), "It is a very good copy; when I say this, I mean that it has very nearly all the effect of the picture." Some of the French artists he met now commended him, although at first they had been very impertinent; and he records, with great complaisance, that one person desired to know whether Hazlitt taught painting in oils. So pleased does he seem to grow with his talents that he almost forgets how much he himself stands in need of training. Little phrases about his rapidity, his dashing off a Titian in a morning, give us the idea of rather an empty and unconscientious style, doubtless not out of sympathy with much of the English tradition of the moment.

Four delightful months were spent in this way in Paris, and in January 1803 Hazlitt returned to London and to his brother's studio. His grandson states that "his next step was to undertake a professional tour in the north of England." Among those who sat to him were the poets Wordsworth and Hartley Coleridge, the latter then a child of seven. Wordsworth, on the occasion of Hazlitt's death, stated that this was the last time that he saw the critic, whose loyal admiration for Wordsworth's poetry, however, knew no abatement. Whether from impatience on

the part of the sitter or the artist's sense of incompetency to carry out so ambitious a task, the portrait of Wordsworth was never finished. It was in 1803, too, that William Hazlitt made the acquaintance of Daniel Stringer at Knutsford. This painter is now entirely forgotten; he was of dissipated habits, and was accused of giving up to country squires and Cheshire ale energies which were meant for mankind. But he had at one time been conceived a possible rival to Sir Joshua himself. Hazlitt, who had admired him, was grieved to find him already indifferent and besotted.

Somewhat earlier than this it was, no doubt, that he attempted his first free study from nature—the head of an old woman, the upper part of the face shaded by the bonnet. He laboured at this, he tells us, with great perseverance, and his reflections throw light on his preparation to be an art-critic. He says, in 1821—

It took me numberless sittings to do it. I have it by me still, and sometimes look at it with surprise, to think how much pains were thrown away to little purpose; yet not altogether in vain, if it taught me to see good in everything, and to know that there is nothing vulgar in nature seen with the eye of science or true art. . . . The picture was never finished, and I might have gone on with it to the present hour.

It is difficult to know how Hazlitt subsisted during these years of perambulatory portrait-painting. He was often in great straits; then a patron would

appear, with his five guineas for a head; and the hopeful artist dined once more on sausages and mashed potatoes. In 1804 he painted his father, reading Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*, and this was accepted and hung in the Royal Academy. Here, then, something like practical success seemed to be dawning for him, but at this very juncture his true profession called him away. In 1804 was finished the earliest of his writings, the *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*. It was published the next year, and almost at the same moment he painted the latest of his portraits, that of Charles Lamb in the costume of a Venetian senator. William Hazlitt the artist became Hazlitt the critic and man of letters.

During these early years, and later, before he took to writing upon art, Hazlitt must have come across many artists, but he has left but faint and slight memorials of any but Northcote. When he was himself painting, he seems to have seen something of Opie in that painter's last exhausting struggle against misfortune. He quotes, with respect, an opinion overheard from Richard Collins, the admirable miniature-painter, who was much his senior, but who was destined to survive him. For the gifted and unhappy James Barry, Hazlitt entertained a tempered enthusiasm. Something in the rude independence and intellectual arrogance of Barry was not distasteful to the critic; who may possibly have attended some of the painter's too-famous lectures. When Barry died, in 1806, the circumstances culminating in that tragedy had

evidently greatly impressed Hazlitt, and coloured his contemptuous resentment against the Royal Academy. Finally, Fuseli, who was working in the Louvre the year that Hazlitt was there, seems to have been known to the latter, and he had some admiration for the man whom Wolcott called the "hobgoblin painter in ordinary to the Devil." Eccentricity, violence, a disregard of the conventions, were at no time in themselves unsympathetic to Hazlitt. It was more difficult for him to be patient with courtiers like Beechey, or with industrious mediocrities like George Dance. To these reputable Academicians it is to be feared that he was sometimes downright rude.

Art-criticism was scarcely a recognised branch of journalism early in the present century. It does not seem to have been until 1814 that it occurred to Hazlitt to utilise his technical knowledge of art by writing on the subject. But, in that year, he began to contribute to the *Morning Chronicle* articles of this appropriate class. This was the period of his first general success, when, at the age of thirty-six, he at length found himself the object of editorial solicitude. Probably the very earliest of Hazlitt's articles on art was that contributed in May 1814 to the *Morning Chronicle* on the subject of Haydon's "Judgment of Solomon." With the young and tempestuous painter of this once-famous work, the critic had now been personally acquainted for two years ; as is well known, Haydon afterwards introduced into his great com-

position, "Christ entering into Jerusalem," the portraits of Hazlitt, Wordsworth, and Keats. The criticism of the "Solomon" is kind and just, but remarkable for its moderation. Hazlitt's desire to please the sensitive Haydon did not make him untrue, and the paper is one which is typical of its author's broad independence of judgment.

It would be tedious to draw up a list, which would necessarily be imperfect, of the desultory contributions to art-criticism made by Hazlitt during the sixteen remaining years of his life. Much attention was called, in 1816, to his lengthy essay in the *Examiner* on "The Catalogue Raisonné of the British Institution." His articles in the *Chronicle* and in the *Champion*, and in particular his series on "The Ideal" in the latter journal for 1815, were far above the average of such work at that day. In 1822 he published his well-known essay on *The Elgin Marbles*. The year 1824 was one of special activity as an art-critic, for he then produced his elaborate disquisition on "The Fine Arts," in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, published his important papers on the *Picture Galleries of England*, and began his *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy*. During the last years of his life, his interest in art-criticism subsided. His essay on Flaxman's *Lectures on Sculpture* appeared in 1829, and his latest act in this direction was to welcome, a very short time before his own death, the election of Martin Archer Shee to the Presidency of the Royal Academy.

The art-criticism of Hazlitt, although to young readers of to-day it may appear mild and anodyne enough, struck his own contemporaries as revolutionary. His was much the same attitude towards the leaders of artistic fashion in 1815 as that of the young men who cultivate the terrors of the initial signature is towards the Academicians of to-day. To comprehend Hazlitt in this connection we may contemplate Mr. George Moore. Each has tried to paint professionally and has resigned the effort; each has been disturbed or disquieted by foreign study; each is, by nature, a man of letters, the slave of intellectual rather than plastic ideas; each is perfectly honest, fearless, and unsympathetic. A parallel of this kind has its obvious dangers, and must not be pushed too far, but an allusion to it may serve to define the position of Hazlitt to a modern reader. He had, of course, a much wider sense of beauty, a much better-balanced mind, than some of these merry swash-bucklers of our own day. It is not to be conceived that in his most frenzied moments he would have talked about "the shoddy commercialism of the Sistine Madonna." He venerated the past; he wrote pure English; but so far as the mere attitude went, he was wholly on the side of what was fresh and eager and revolutionary.

In the first place, Hazlitt as an art-critic was boldly non-academic. Among his earliest papers are two, contributed in 1814 to the *Champion*, called "An Inquiry whether the Fine Arts are promoted by

Academies." Here his language was temperate if stringent, but things went from bad to worse, and, two years later, he published that essay on "The Catalogue Raisonné of the British Institution" which produced so wide a sensation and created for him so many enemies. Here he lifts the lash high in air, and brings it down with a will on the shoulders of official art. He returned to the same favourite theme in his graver monograph on *The Fine Arts*, in 1824, still doubting, though no longer strenuously denying, the service done to art by corporate institutions of any kind. The English painting of that day was a poor affair, bolstered into prominence by prejudice and flattery. The bolts of Hazlitt seem, at this distance of time, almost ludicrously heavy. Why, we may ask ourselves, expend powder and shot on people like Beechey, and Westall, and Dance? It must not be forgotten, however, that to their own generation these seemed very great men. The arrogance of Beechey, for instance, knew no bounds; and it showed real courage in Hazlitt, and coolness of perception too, to strike at these Court favourites of Somerset House.

Hazlitt was no less courageous in defending unpopular merit. When the reputation of Richard Wilson was in the dust, when the compilers of treatises on British painting felt secure in omitting his name, Hazlitt insisted on the splendid merits of his work, and even brought down censure on himself by his persistent praise of Wilson. Of his wise and wholesome championship of Haydon, mention has

already been made. Before Mr. Ruskin was born, Hazlitt had discovered that "in landscape Turner has shown a knowledge of the effects of air, and of powerful relief in objects, which was never surpassed." To the genius of Hogarth, to the breadth and fulness of his "epic pictures," Hazlitt drew back the attention of contemporaries, long seduced by the prettinesses of Cosway and Beechey. He was not lavish in his allusions to particular artists. He was more interested in the principles of his contemporaries than in their practice, but it will be difficult to point to a single instance, in the most ephemeral of his essays, where he has praised any painter because he was a public favourite, or neglected one because he was out of critical favour with the age.

The style of Hazlitt as an art-critic is of two kinds. When he deals with the theory of art, he is strenuous, close, and sententious. We observe him here to be still a little under the influence of the eighteenth-century theorists. He does not quite, like Burke, tell us that sub-fusc hues are indispensable from the sublime, but we find ourselves regretting that he had not read Lessing more or to better purpose. Hazlitt seems to have been conscious of the shortcomings of Reynolds's *Discourses*, but his own theoretical essays on the same subject are no livelier in style, and, of course, come to the reader with infinitely less technical authority.

The student of to-day, desirous of examining this department of Hazlitt's work, can do no better

than to read the sensible and elegant essay *On the Judging of Pictures*. It contains some reflections on "the exclusiveness of the initiated" which may be wholesomely contrasted with certain recent utterances. Hazlitt's elaborate excursus upon *The Fine Arts*, published in 1824, is, on the other hand, only to be skimmed through or dipped into. It is ill constructed, and, what is worse, it is dull. But the least effective of his theoretical essays, and that in which the limitations of his judgment are most clearly seen, is the review of *Flaxman's Lectures*. It is true that Flaxman was a very poor critic, and Hazlitt has no difficulty in effectively pulling to pieces his flashy truistic philosophy. But when he leaves Flaxman the professor to deal with Flaxman the sculptor, Hazlitt becomes insufferable. His training had been limited; of sculpture he knew less than the least of Academy students; and his views about modern statuary, in spite of his enthusiasm for the Elgin Marbles, are practically worthless.

But when we turn from Hazlitt on the principles of art, to Hazlitt on particular pictures, the change is extraordinary. We pass into a different order of style. Here, so far from being abstruse or dry, he errs a little in the other direction. His notices of pictures are, indeed, wonderfully free from mere artistic jargon. A reader of to-day may smile, it is true, at a few such words as "gusto" and "vertù," but they belonged to the age. For the rest, what Hazlitt aims at, is nothing more nor less than a spiritual

reproduction of a physical impression. He describes, but with the design of producing, on the mental retina, an image which shall create a like enthusiasm on the mind as the sight of the picture does when the physical eye regards it. This is not quite the same thing as repeating the impression made on the physical eye, because the critic endeavours, by subtly heightening his effects, to compensate for the necessary absence of colour and form. Hazlitt writes, to be short, not so much for those who are about to see the picture, as for those who will never have the chance of seeing it, and his object is to give these latter as much pleasure as the former will presently enjoy. Hence his rich and sometimes over-luscious descriptions can hardly be read side by side with the paintings they deal with.

The most perfect type of this class of Hazlitt's criticism is his *Portrait by Vandyck*. This is no photographer's or auctioneer's catalogue of features, and still less a technical examination of methods of work, of *facture*; it rather is an involved, amorous, highly-coloured rhapsody, a communicated rapture. Hazlitt thought it interesting to read of pictures he himself would never see; and in those days, when facilities were rarer and public galleries fewer, he believed that it would stimulate a great number of sequestered lovers of the beautiful, to be supplied with these materials for dream-compositions.

Sometimes Hazlitt's epithets were too much loaded with sweetness; this error is exemplified in his essay

on *William's Views*. But the higher his theme, the more noble and appropriate were his flights of ecstacy, the more completely did he fulfil his purpose of stimulating the imagination. The process of his analysis was always literary, and his trust in his optical memory too confiding, so that sometimes, between poetry and a confused recollection, we get a description of an ancient master, which fits no recognised example. Yet it is always true to the master. Hazlitt, so fiery and fitful in real life, has no prejudices in art, unless, indeed, it be against Poelemborg and against the modern French.

In *Pictures at Wilton* Hazlitt says, "No one ever felt a longing, a sickness of the heart, to see a Dutch landscape twice; but those of Claude, after an absence of years, have this effect, and produce a kind of calenture." This is a remark which is highly characteristic of its author. Although Hazlitt had been, to some imperfect extent, trained in the technical practice of a painter, the fragments of his art-criticism do not show any great appreciation of the niceties of execution. He is always led away from the mode in which a picture is painted, to the subject and the exposition. It is by no means certain, indeed it is rather improbable, that a work of art, very splendidly performed, but of no sentimental interest, would attract his attention; on the other hand, a heroic or romantic theme, inadequately treated, was only too likely to impose upon his fancy. In other words, Hazlitt, the art-critic, wandering

through a gallery of pictures, was always Hazlitt the man of letters, steeped in poetical association, and principally charmed with Titian because he reminded him of Spenser and of Ariosto.

This literary bias will seem very contemptible to those young newspaper despots of our own day, whose first demand from art is that it should mean nothing and suggest nothing. If it be true that to look for "literature" in a picture be the worst of faults in an art-critic, then, indeed, little can be said to palliate the errors of Hazlitt. His system, we must allow, was primitive, and his range of knowledge narrow. But, in his own time and way, he also was a transmitter of the sacred fire. He possessed, what so many of our modern quidnuncs have absolutely lost the idea of, the passion of beauty. His eye, as he finely says in speaking of Titian, had gazed on lovely pigments till it was "saturated" with their loveliness.

Hazlitt's criticism is transitional between the dry and formal philosophy of the eighteenth century, and the many-coloured enthusiasm of Mr. Ruskin. At a time when little real attention was paid to art-criticism, when in England at least it was bound up with an empty connoisseurship, and lost in the jargon of the dilettanti, it is the glory of William Hazlitt that he claimed for it the dignity of a branch of literature, and expended on it the wealth of his own fervid and impassioned imagination.

E. G.

JAMES NORTHCOTE

A PROMINENT and a respectable artist in his own day, and one ambitious of the highest forms of notoriety, James Northcote has, in late years, fallen into unmerited obscurity. He was a Devonshire man, claiming relationship with the family of the present Earl of Iddesleigh, but if correctly, at least through a poor and distant branch. He was born at Plymouth on the 22nd of October 1746, and received great kindness from the family of Dr. Zachary Mudge. It was through the Mudges, no doubt, that he first heard of the greatness of Reynolds. Northcote himself records that when, in 1762, that painter came down to Plymouth in company with Dr. Samuel Johnson, he pushed forward in the crowd to touch the skirt of the coat of Reynolds.

As a boy, he desired to become a painter, but his father resolutely refused his consent.

At length, at the age of five-and-twenty, Northcote broke away from home, walked up to London, and succeeded in being received into Joshua Reynolds's

studio. Here he was from the first industrious, but continued for a while to be ignorant and to show little aptitude for learning. Reynolds, however, was patient, and Northcote rewarded his kindness by enthusiastic attention. In 1773 he began to exhibit at the Royal Academy.

After serving Reynolds for five years, he determined to set up as an artist on his own account, in May 1776. He went down into Devonshire, whence he started for France and Italy, settling finally at Rome, and endeavouring, without the least success, to discover the secret of the colouring of Titian. He was in Italy from 1777 to 1780. Returning to London, he lived for nine years at 2 Old Bond Street, where he blossomed out into a historical painter under the patronage of Boydell, and was made A.R.A. in 1786, and full R.A. 13th February 1787. In 1791 he settled at 39 Argyll Street, where he continued to live until 1822, when he removed round the corner to 8 Argyll Place.

In 1802 Hazlitt was introduced to Northcote, and the artist immediately conceived a considerable sympathy for the caustic young critic. Doubtless, they kept up one another's spirits by saying very disagreeable things about the more valued of their acquaintances. Hazlitt's description of Northcote, and of his relations with Northcote, is picturesque, besides being frank almost to excess. It is needful to quote it here, for it is a luminous illustration to the *Conversations* :—

The person whose doors I enter with most pleasure, and quit with the most regret, never did me the smallest favour. I once did him an unlooked-for service, and we nearly quarrelled about it. If I were in the utmost distress, I should just as soon think of asking his assistance as of stopping a person on the highway. Practical benevolence is not his *forte*. He leaves the profession of that to others. His habits, his theory are against it as idle and vulgar. His hand is closed ; but what of that ? His eye is ever open, and reflects the universe : his silver accents, beautiful, venerable as his silver hairs, but not scantied, flow as a river. I never ate or drank in his house ; nor do I know or care how the flies or the spiders fare in it, or whether a mouse can get a living. But I know that I can get there what I can get nowhere else,—a welcome, as if one was expected to drop in at just that moment, a total absence of all respect of persons, and of airs of self-consequence, endless topics of discourse, refined thoughts, made more striking by ease and simplicity of manner,—the husk, the shell of humanity is left at the door, and the spirit, mellowed by time, resides within !

The intellectual stimulus produced by these conversations was so great that Hazlitt was at last induced to jot down some notes of them. He tells us that he did not do so without asking and obtaining Northcote's leave. This presupposes that the idea in Hazlitt's mind was already that of publication. He tells us that Northcote made the following faint objections, which are not without their interest :—

I do assure you [Northcote said] that you overrate [these conversations]. You have not lived enough in society to be a judge. What is new to you you think will seem so to others. To be sure, there is one thing, I have had the advantage of having lived in good society myself. I not only passed a great deal of my younger days in the company of Reynolds, Johnson, and that circle, but I was brought up among the Mudges, of whom Sir Joshua (who was certainly used to the most brilliant society of the metropolis) thought so highly that he had them at his house for weeks, and sometimes gave up his own bedroom to receive them. Yet they were not thought superior to several other persons at Plymouth, who were distinguished, some for their satirical wit, others for their delightful fancy, others for their information or sound sense, and with all of whom my father was familiar when I was a boy.

It is impossible not to believe that Hazlitt is slightly satirical in reporting this remark of the old provincial painter, on whom the Mudges, no doubt, produced an effect of very substantial gentility.

It is scarcely, however, as authorities on the Quality that we turn to-day either to Northcote or to Hazlitt. Of the former, indeed, there may not be very much in the volume which we re-edit to-day. Hazlitt confessed that he took Northcote as his lay figure, attributing to him sentiments which he might have expressed, had their subject happened to arise, and weaving fictive reflections around genuine anecdotes. "In a word," the only author and begetter says, "Mr.

Northcote is only answerable for the wit, sense, and spirit there may be in these papers; I take all the dulness, impertinence, and malice upon myself. He has furnished the text,—I fear I have often spoiled it by the commentary.”

There can be no question that Northcote, who loved notoriety, was charmed at the opportunity given him of being publicly witty without taking either trouble or responsibility. In 1826 Hazlitt began to publish the conversations in the *New Monthly Magazine*, entitling them “Boswell Redivivus.” Four instalments appeared; they were much talked about, and Northcote began to grow alarmed. He began to repudiate his share in the *Conversations*, and we might be allowed to believe that he did so justly, were it not that Patmore, who knew both men, and was not unfrequently present, vouches for Hazlitt’s scrupulous accuracy on the most debatable point. It was positively for what he said regarding his own sacred Mudges, about whom Hazlitt could know little, that Northcote was specially censured for ill-nature.

Northcote burst into a theatrical rage, sent for Mr. Colburn, the publisher of the *New Monthly Magazine*, abused the editor, desired that the publication of “those awful papers” should abruptly cease, and gave all the outward signs of being excessively indignant and incensed. It was all stage-playing, however, and the biographer of Hazlitt relates that the painter saw the critic as often and as amicably as ever, that notes of the *Conversations* were still taken

down in the presence of that scandalised intimate of the Mudges, and that they continued to appear in print. All the concession that was made was that, instead of the *New Monthly Magazine*, the *Atlas* newspaper became the vehicle of their publication.

The partnership of this strange pair of friends was not confined to the *Conversations*, which came out as a volume in 1830. Northcote was ambitious to be a fabulist, and it is certain that Hazlitt helped him with the two series of his *Fables*. At the very close of the painter's life, the two friends combined in the production of a work, *The Life of Titian*, which bears Northcote's name, and does no great credit to the talents of either. Their powers were by this time impaired, in one case by illness, in the other by old age, and neither was long to survive this perfunctory piece of partnership. William Hazlitt died at 6 Frith Street, Soho, on the 18th of September 1830, in his fifty-third year, and James Northcote at his house in Argyll Place, on the 13th of July 1831, in his eighty-fifth year.

Northcote had, in his long and eccentric will, made a legacy of £100 to Hazlitt, in case the latter should be living after the death of the painter's sister, Mary Northcote. His body is buried in the vault under the New St. Marylebone Church, his wish to be laid in St. Paul's Churchyard, "near his lamented friend and master, Sir Joshua Reynolds," not being realised.

When the *Conversations* appeared in book form, they were provided with no prefatory or explicatory matter of any kind, and had the appearance of not having received the author's final revision. An effective steel engraving of Northcote in his eighty-second year, by Thomas Wright, after a drawing by Northcote's humble friend and fellow West-countryman, Abraham Wivell, served as the frontispiece to this original edition.

E. G.

HAZLITT'S

CONVERSATIONS WITH NORTHCOTE

CONVERSATION THE FIRST

CALLED on Mr. Northcote ; had, as usual, an interesting conversation. Spoke of some account of Lord Byron in a newspaper, which he thought must be like. "The writer says, he did not wish to be thought merely a great poet. My sister asked, 'What then did he wish to be thought?' Why, I'll tell you ; he wished to be something different from everybody else. As to nobility, there were many others before him, so that he could not rely upon that ; and then, as to poetry, there are so many wretched creatures that pretend to the name, that he looked at it with disgust ; he thought himself as distinct from them as the stars in the firmament.

"It comes to what Sir Joshua used to say, that a man who is at the head of his profession is above it. I remember being at Cosway's,¹ where they were recom-

¹ Richard Cosway, R.A. (1740-1821), perhaps the most fashionable painter of the generation succeeding that of Reynolds. [ED.]

mending some charitable institution for the relief of decayed artists ; and I said I would not be of it, for it was holding out a temptation to idleness, and bringing those into the profession who were not fit for it. Some one who wanted to flatter me observed, 'I wonder you should talk in this manner, who are under such obligations to the art !' I answered immediately, 'If I am to take your compliment as I believe it is meant, I might answer, that it is the art that is under obligations to me, not I to it. Do you suppose that Rubens, Titian, and others were under obligations to the art—they who raised it from obscurity and made it all that it is? What would the art be without these?'

"The world in general, as Miss Reynolds used to say, with reference to her brother, think no more of a painter than they do of a fiddler or a dancing-master or a pianoforte-maker. And so of a poet. I have always said of that dispute about burying Lord Byron in Poets' Corner that he would have resisted it violently if he could have known of it. Not but there were many very eminent names there, with whom he would like to be associated ; but then there were others that he would look down upon. If they had laid him there, he would have got up again. No ; I'll tell you where they should have laid him—if they had buried him with the kings in Henry VII.'s Chapel, he would have had no objection to that ! One cannot alter the names of things, or the prejudices of the world respecting

them, to suit one's convenience. I once went with Hoppner¹ to the hustings to vote for Horne Tooke; and when they asked me what I was, I said, a painter. At this Hoppner was very mad all the way home, and said I should have called myself a portrait-painter. I replied, the world had no time to trouble their heads about such distinctions. I afterwards asked Kemble, who agreed I was right, that he always called himself a player," etc.

I then observed, I had been to the play with G[odwin]² and his daughter, from the last of whom I had learnt something about Lord Byron's conversation. "What!" he said, "the beauty-daughter?" I said, "Do you think her a beauty, then?"—"Why no, she rather thinks herself one, and yet there is something about her that would pass for such. Girls generally find out where to place themselves. She's clever too; isn't she?"—"Oh! yes."—"What did she tell you about Lord Byron? because I am curious to know all about him."—"I asked her if it was true that Lord Byron was so poor a creature as H[unt] represented him?"³ She at first misunderstood me, and said, nothing could be meaner than he was, and

¹ John Hoppner, R.A. (1758-1810), the portrait-painter. [ED.]

² William Godwin was at this time living in the Strand, engaged on his *History of the Commonwealth*. His daughter Mary, after the death of Shelley, had rejoined her father, and was now his chief companion. [ED.]

³ Leigh Hunt's most unfortunate work, *Lord Byron and some of his Contemporaries*, had then (1828) just appeared, and was causing great scandal. [ED.]

gave some instances of it. I said, that was not what I meant ; that I could believe anything of that kind of him ; that whatever he took in his head he would carry to extremes, regardless of everything but the feeling of the moment ; but that I could not conceive him to be in conversation, or in any other way, a flat and *commonplace* person.¹ ‘Oh ! no,’ she said, ‘he was not. H[unt] was hardly a fair judge. The other had not behaved well to him, and whenever they met, H[unt] always began some kind of argument, and as Lord Byron could not argue, they made but a bad piece of business of it, and it ended unsatisfactorily for all parties.’

“I said, H[unt] was too apt to put people to their trumps, or to force them upon doing not what *they* could do, but what he thought *he* could do. He, however, not only gave his own opinion, but said, Mr. S[helley] could only just endure Lord Byron’s company. This seemed to me odd ; for though he might be neither orator nor philosopher, yet anything he might say or only stammer out in broken sentences, must be interesting ; a glance, a gesture would be full of meaning ; or he would make one look about one like the tree in Virgil, that expressed itself by groans.

“To this she assented, and observed—‘At least S[helley] and myself found it so ; for we generally sat with him till morning. He was perhaps a little

¹ Mr. Moore has just written a book to prove the truth of the contrary opinion. [HAZLITT.]

moody and reserved at first; but by touching on certain strings, he began to unbend, and gave the most extraordinary accounts of his own feelings and adventures that could be imagined. Besides, he was very handsome, and it was some satisfaction to look at a head at once so beautiful and expressive!

“I repeated what H[unt] told me, that when he and Lord Byron met in Italy, they did not know one another; he himself from having grown so thin, and Byron from having grown so fat, like a great chubby schoolboy—a circumstance which shocked his lordship so much, that he took to drinking vinegar at a great rate, that he might recover the figure of the stripling God. I mentioned some things that H[unt] had reported of Lord Byron; such as his saying, ‘He never cared for anything above a day,’—which might be merely in a fit of spleen, or from the spirit of contradiction, or to avoid an imputation of *sentimentality*.”

“Oh!” said Northcote, “that will never do, to take things literally that are uttered in a moment of irritation. You do not express your own opinion, but one as opposite as possible to that of the person that has provoked you. You get as far from a person you have taken a pique against as you can, just as you turn off the pavement to get out of the way of a chimney-sweeper; but it is not to be supposed you prefer walking in the mud, for all that! I have often been ashamed myself of speeches I have made in that way, which have been repeated to me as *good things*, when all I meant was that I

would say anything sooner than agree to the nonsense or affectation I heard. You then set yourself against what you think a wrong bias in another, and are not like a wall but a buttress—as far from the right line as your antagonist; and the more absurd he is, the more so do you become. Before you attend to what any one says, you should ask, Was he talking to a fool or a wise man? No; H[unt] would make Lord Byron tributary to him, or would make him out to be nothing. I wonder you admire him as you do, and compare him to the wits of Charles II. It isn't writing verses or painting a picture—that, as Sir Joshua used to say, is what everybody can do: but it is the doing something more than anybody else can do that entitles the poet or the artist to distinction, or makes the work live. But these people shut themselves up in a little circle of their own, and fancy all the world are looking at them."

I said, H[unt] had been spoiled by flattery when he was young. "Oh! no," he said, "it was not that. Sir Joshua was not spoiled by flattery, and yet he had as much of it as anybody need have; but he was looking out to see what the world said of him, or thinking what figure he should make by the side of Correggio or Vandyke, not pluming himself on being a better painter than some one in the next street, or being surprised that the people at his own table spoke in praise of his pictures. It is a little mind that is taken up with the nearest object, or puffed up with

immediate notice: to do anything great, we must look out of ourselves and see things upon a broader scale."

I told Northcote I had promised H[aydon] I would bring him to see him; and then, said I, you would think as favourably of him as I do, and everybody else that knows him. "But you didn't say anything in my praise to induce him to come?"—"Oh! yes; I exerted all my eloquence."—"That wasn't the way. You should have said I was a poor creature, perhaps amusing for half an hour or so, or curious to see like a little dried mummy in a museum: but he would not hear of your having two idols! Depend upon it, he'll not come. Such characters only want to be surrounded with satellites or echoes: and that is one reason they never improve. True genius, as well as wisdom, is ever docile, humble, vigilant, and ready to acknowledge the merit it seeks to appropriate from every quarter.

"That was Fuseli's mistake. Nothing was good enough for him, that was not a repetition of himself. So once when I told him of a very fine Vandyke, he made answer—'And what is it? A little bit of colour. I wouldn't go across the way to see it.' On my telling this to Sir Joshua, he said—'Ay, he'll repent it, he'll repent it!' W[ordsworth] is another of those who would narrow the universe to their own standard. It is droll to see how hard you labour to prop him up too, and seem to fancy he'll live."—"I think he stands a better chance than Lord

Byron. He has added one original feature to our poetry, which the other has not ; and this, you know, sir, by your own rule, gives him the best title.”—
“Yes ; but the little bit that he has added is not enough. None but great objects can be seen at a distance. If posterity looked at it with your eyes, they might think his poetry curious and pretty. But consider how many Sir Walter Scotts, how many Lord Byrons, how many Dr. Johnsons there will be in the next hundred years ; how many reputations will rise and sink in that time ; and do you imagine, amid these conflicting and important claims, such trifles as descriptions of daisies and idiot boys (however well they may be done) will not be swept away in the tide of time, like straws and weeds by the torrent ? No ; the world can only keep in view the principal and most perfect productions of human ingenuity ; such works as Dryden’s, Pope’s, and a few others, that from their unity, their completeness, their polish have the stamp of immortality upon them, and seem indestructible like an element of nature. There are few of these : I fear your friend W[ordsworth] is not one.”

I said, I thought one circumstance against him was the want of popularity in his lifetime. Few people made much noise after their deaths who did not do so while they were living. Posterity could not be supposed to rake into the records of past times for the Illustrious Obscure ; and only ratified or annulled the lists of great names handed down to

them by the voice of common fame. Few people recovered from the neglect or obloquy of their contemporaries. The public would hardly be at the pains to try the same cause twice over, or did not like to reverse its own sentence, at least when on the unfavourable side. There was Hobbes, for instance : he had a bad name while living, and it was of no use to think at this time of day of doing him justice. While the priests and politicians were tearing him in pieces for his atheism and arbitrary principles, Mr. Locke stole his philosophy from him ; and I would fain see any one restore it to the right owner. Quote the passages one by one, show that every principle of the modern metaphysical system was contained in Hobbes, and that all that succeeding writers have done was to deduce from Mr. Locke's imperfect concessions the very consequences, "armed all in proof," that already existed in an entire and unmutilated state in his predecessor ; and you shall the next day hear Mr. Locke spoken of as the father of English philosophy as currently and confidently as if not the shadow of a doubt had ever been started on the subject.

Mr. Hobbes, by the boldness and comprehensiveness of his views, had shocked the prejudices and drawn down upon his head the enmity of his contemporaries : Mr. Locke, by going more cautiously to work, and only admitting as much at a time as the public mind would bear, prepared the way for the rest of Mr. Hobbes's philosophy, and for a vast

reputation for himself, which nothing can impugn. *Stat nominis umbra.* The world are too far off to distinguish names from things; and call Mr. Locke the first of English philosophers, as they call a star by a particular name, because others call it so. They also dislike to have their confidence in a great name destroyed, and fear, that by displacing one of their favoured idols from its niche in the Temple of Fame, they may endanger the whole building.

NORTHCOTE.—“Why, I thought Hobbes stood as high as anybody. I have always heard him spoken of in that light. It is not his capacity that people dispute, but they object to his character. The world will not encourage vice, for their own sakes; and they give a casting-vote in favour of virtue. Mr. Locke was a modest, conscientious inquirer after truth, and the world had the sagacity to see this and to be willing to give him a hearing; the other, I conceive, was a bully, and a bad man into the bargain, and they did not want to be bullied into truth or to sanction licentiousness. This is unavoidable; for the desire of knowledge is but one principle of the mind.

“It was the same with Tom Paine. Nobody can deny that he was a very fine writer and a very sensible man; but he flew in the face of a whole generation, and no wonder that they were too much for him, and that his name is become a byword with such multitudes, for no other reason than that he did not care what offence he gave them by contradicting

all their most inveterate prejudices. If you insult a roomful of people, you will be kicked out of it. So neither will the world at large be insulted with impunity. If you tell a whole country that they are fools and knaves, they will not return the compliment by crying you up as the pink of wisdom and honesty. Nor will those who come after be very apt to take up your quarrel. It was not so much Paine's being a republican or an unbeliever, as the manner in which he brought his opinions forward (which showed self-conceit and want of feeling) that subjected him to obloquy. People did not like the temper of the man : it falls under the article of moral virtue.

“There are some reputations that are great, merely because they are amiable. There is Dr. Watts : look at the encomiums passed on him by Dr. Johnson ; and yet to what, according to his statement, does his merit amount ? Why only to this, that he did that best which none can do well, and employed his talents uniformly for the welfare of mankind. He was a good man, and the voice of the public has given him credit for being a great one. The world may be forced to do homage to great talents, but they only bow willingly to these when they are joined with benevolence and modesty ; nor will they put weapons into the hands of the bold and unprincipled sophist to be turned against their own interests and wishes.”

I said, there was a great deal in the manner of bringing truth forward to influence its reception

with the reader; for not only did we resent unwelcome novelties advanced with an insolent and dogmatical air; but we were even ready to give up our favourite notions, when we saw them advocated in a harsh and intolerant manner by those of our own party, sooner than submit to the pretensions of blindfold presumption. If anything could make me a bigot, it would be the arrogance of the free-thinker; if anything could make me a slave, it would be the sordid sneering fopperies and sweeping clauses of the Liberal party. Renegadoes are generally made so, not by the overtures of their adversaries, but by disgust at the want of candour and moderation in their friends. Northcote replied—"To be sure, there was nothing more painful than to have one's own opinions disfigured or thrust down one's throat by impertinence and folly; and that once when a pedantic coxcomb was crying up Raphael to the skies, he could not help saying—'If there was nothing in Raphael but what *you* can see in him, we should not now have been talking of him!'"

CONVERSATION THE SECOND

WHEN I called, I found Mr. Northcote painting a portrait of himself. Another stood on an easel. He asked me, which I thought most like? I said, the one he was about was the best, but not good enough. It looks like a physician or a member of Parliament, but it ought to look like something more—a Cardinal or a Spanish Inquisitor! I do not think you ought to proceed in painting your own face as you do with some others—that is, by trying to improve upon it: you have only to make it like; for the more like it is, the better it will be as a picture. “Oh! he tried to make it like.”

I found I had got upon a wrong scent. Mr. Northcote, as an artist, was not bound to have a fine head, but he was bound to paint one. I am always a very bad courtier; and think of what strikes me, and not of the effect upon others. So I once tried to compliment a very handsome *brunette* by telling her how much I admired dark beauties. “Oh!” said Northcote, “you should have told her she was fair. She did not like *black*, though you did!” After

all, there is a kind of selfishness in this plain-speaking. In the present case, it set us wrong the whole morning, and I had to stay longer than usual to recover the old track. I was continually in danger of over-setting a stand with a small looking-glass, which Northcote particularly cautioned me not to touch; and every now and then he was prying into the glass by stealth, to see if the portrait was like. He had on a green velvet cap, and looked very like Titian.

Northcote then turning round, said, "I wanted to ask you about a speech you made the other day: you said you thought you could have made something of portrait, but that you never could have painted history. What did you mean by that?"—"Oh! all I meant was, that sometimes when I see a fine Titian or Rembrandt, I feel as if I could have done something of the same kind with the proper pains, but I have never the same feeling with respect to Raphael. My admiration is there utterly unmixed with emulation or regret. In fact, I see what is before me, but I have no invention."

NORTHCOTE.—"You do not know till you try. There is not so much difference as you imagine. Portrait often runs into history, and history into portrait, without our knowing it. Expression is common to both, and that is the chief difficulty. The greatest history-painters have always been able portrait-painters. How should a man paint a thing in motion, if he cannot paint it still? But the great point is to catch the prevailing look and character:

if you are master of this, you can make almost what use of it you please. If a portrait has force, it will do for history; and if history is well painted, it will do for portrait. This is what gave dignity to Sir Joshua: his portraits had always that determined air and character that you know what to think of them as if you had seen them engaged in the most decided action.

“So Fuseli said of Titian’s picture of Paul III. and his two nephews, ‘That is true history!’ Many of the groups in the Vatican, by Raphael, are only collections of fine portraits. That is why West, Barry, and others pretended to despise portrait, because they could not do it, and it would only expose their want of truth and nature. No! if you can give the *look*, you need not fear painting history. Yet how difficult that is, and on what slight causes it depends! It is not enough that it is seen, unless it is at the same time felt. How odd it seems, that often while you are looking at a face, and though you perceive no difference in the features, yet you find they have undergone a total alteration of expression!

“What a fine hand then is required to trace what the eye can scarcely be said to distinguish! So I used to contend against Sir Joshua, that Raphael had triumphed over this difficulty in the Miracle of Bolsena, where he has given the internal blush of the unbelieving priest at seeing the wafer turned into blood; the colour, to be sure, assists, but the look

of stupefaction and shame is also there in the most marked degree. Sir Joshua said it was my fancy, but I am as convinced of it as I am of my existence; and the proof is that otherwise he has done nothing. There is no story without it; but he has trusted to the expression to tell the story, instead of leaving the expression to be made out from the story. I have often observed the same thing in myself, when I have blamed any one as mildly as I could, not using any violence of language, nor indeed intending to hurt; and I have afterwards wondered at the effect; my sister has said, 'You should have seen your look,' but I did not know of it myself."—I said, "If you had, it would have been less felt by others.

"An instance of this made me laugh not long ago. I was offended at a waiter for very ill behaviour at an inn at Calais; and while he was out of the room I was putting on as angry a look as I could, but I found this sort of previous rehearsal to no purpose. The instant he returned into the room, I gave him a look that I felt made it unnecessary to tell him what I thought."—"To be sure, he would see it immediately."

"And don't you think, sir," I said, "that this explains the difficulty of fine acting, and the difference between good acting and bad—that is, between face-making or mouthing and genuine passion? To give the last, an actor must possess the highest truth of imagination, and must undergo an entire revolution of feeling. Is it wonderful that so many prefer an artificial to a natural actor, the mask to the man, the

pompous pretension to the simple expression? Not at all; the wonder rather is that people in general judge so right as they do, when they have such doubtful grounds to go upon; and they would not, but they trust less to rules or reasoning than to their feelings."

NORTHCOTE.—"You must come to that at last. The common sense of mankind (whether a good or a bad one) is the best criterion you have to appeal to. You necessarily impose upon yourself in judging of your own works. Whenever I am trying at an expression, I hang up the picture in the room and ask people what it means, and if they guess right, I think I have succeeded. You yourself see the thing as you wish it, or according to what you have been endeavouring to make it.

"When I was doing the figures of Argyll in prison and of his enemy who comes and finds him asleep, I had a great difficulty to encounter in conveying the expression of the last—indeed I did it from myself—I wanted to give a look of mingled remorse and admiration; and when I found that others saw this look in the sketch I had made, I left off. By going on, I might lose it again. There is a point of felicity which, whether you fall short of or have gone beyond it, can only be determined by the effect on the unprejudiced observer. You cannot be always with your picture to explain it to others: it must be left to speak for itself. Those who stand before their pictures and make fine

speeches about them, do themselves a world of harm : a painter should cut out his tongue, if he wishes to succeed. His language addresses itself not to the ear, but the eye. He should stick to that as much as possible. Sometimes you hit off an effect without knowing it. Indeed the happiest results are frequently the most unconscious. Boaden¹ was here the other day. You don't remember Henderson,² I suppose?"—"No."—"He says his reading was the most perfect he ever knew. He thought himself a pretty good reader and a tolerable mimic ; that he succeeded tolerably well in imitating Kemble, Mrs. Siddons, and others, but that there was something in Henderson's reading so superior to all the rest, that he never could come anything near it. I told him, You don't know that : if you were to hear him now, you might think him even worse than your own imitation of him. We deceive ourselves as much with respect to the excellences of others as we do with respect to our own, by dwelling on a favourite idea. In order to judge, you should ask some one else who remembered him.

"I spoke to him about Kemble, whose life he has been lately writing. I said, when he sat to me for the Richard III. meeting the children, he lent me no assistance whatever in the expres-

¹ James Boaden (1762-1839), the dramatic biographer and Shakespearian critic. [ED.]

² John Henderson (1747-1785), called "The Bath Roscius," the rival of Garrick. [ED.]

sion I wished to give, but remained quite immovable, as if he were sitting for an ordinary portrait. Boaden said, This was his way: he never put himself to any exertion, except in his professional character. If any one wanted to know his idea of a part or of a particular passage, his reply always was, 'You must come and see me do it.'

Northcote then spoke of the boy, as he always calls him (Master Betty). He asked if I had ever seen him act, and I said, Yes, and was one of his admirers. He answered, "Oh! yes, it was such a beautiful effusion of natural sensibility; and then that graceful play of the limbs in youth gave such an advantage over every one about him. Humphreys¹ (the artist) said, 'He had never seen the little Apollo off the pedestal before.' You see the same thing in the boys at Westminster School. But no one was equal to him." Mr. Northcote alluded with pleasure to his unaffected manners when a boy, and mentioned as an instance of his simplicity, his saying one day, "If they admire me so much, what would they say to Mr. Harley?" (a tragedian in the same strolling company with himself).

We then spoke of his acting since he was grown up. Northcote said, "He went to see him one night with Fuseli, in *Alexander the Great*, and that

¹ This can hardly be the well-known Ozias Humphrey, although he had been Northcote's friend, for he had been dead for twenty years; William Humphreys, the engraver (1794-1865), must be meant, unless Hazlitt made a mistake. [ED.]

he observed, coming out, they could get nobody to do it better."—"Nor so well," said Fuseli. A question being put, "Why then could he not succeed at present?"—"Because," said Northcote, "the world will never admire twice. The first surprise was excited by his being a boy; and when that was over, nothing could bring them back again to the same point, not though he had turned out a second Roscius. They had taken a surfeit of their idol, and wanted something new. Nothing he could do could astonish them so much the second time, as the youthful prodigy had done the first time; and therefore he must always appear as a foil to himself, and seem comparatively flat and insipid. Garrick kept up the fever of public admiration as long as anybody; but when he returned to the stage after a short absence, no one went to see him.

"It was the same with Sir Joshua: latterly Romney drew all his sitters from him. So they say the Exhibition is worse every year, though it is just the same: there are the same subjects and the same painters. Admiration is a forced tribute, and to extort it from mankind (envious and ignorant as they are) they must be taken unawares." I remarked, "It was the same in books; if an author was only equal to himself, he was always said to fall off. The blow to make the same impression must be doubled, because we are prepared for it. We give him the whole credit of his first successful production, because it was altogether unexpected;

but if he does not rise as much above himself in the second instance, as the first was above nothing, we are disappointed and say he has fallen off, for our feelings are not equally excited."

"Just," said Northcote, "as in painting a portrait : people are surprised at the first sitting, and wonder to see how you have got on : but I tell them they will never see so much done again ; for at first there was nothing but a blank canvas to work upon, but afterwards you have to improve upon your own design, and this at every step becomes more and more difficult. It puts me in mind of an observation of Opie's, that it was wrong to suppose that people went on improving to the last in any art or profession : on the contrary, they put their best ideas into their first works (which they have been qualifying themselves to undertake all their lives before) ; and what they gain afterwards in correctness and refinement, they lose in originality and vigour."

I assented to this as a very striking and (as I thought) sound remark. He said, "I wish you had known Opie :¹ he was a very original-minded man. Mrs. Siddons used to say, 'I like to meet Mr. Opie ; for then I always hear something I did not know before.' I do not say that he was always right ; but he always put your thoughts into a new track, that was worth following. I was very fond of Opie's conversation ; and I

¹ John Opie, R.A., a West-countryman like Northcote, had died in 1807. [ED.]

remember once when I was expressing my surprise at his having so little of the Cornish dialect; 'Why,' he said, 'the reason is, I never spoke at all till I knew you and Wolcott.' He was a true genius.

"Mr. —— is a person of great judgment; but I do not learn so much from him. I think this is the difference between sense and genius;—a man of genius judges for himself, and you hear nothing but what is original from him: but a man of sense or with a knowledge of the world, judges as others do; and he is on this account the safest guide to follow, though not, perhaps, the most instructive companion. I recollect Miss Reynolds¹ making nearly the same observation. She said—'I don't know how it is; I don't think Miss C——² a very clever woman, and yet, whenever I am at a loss about anything, I always go to consult her, and her advice is almost sure to be right.' The reason was, that this lady, instead of taking her own view of the subject (as a person of superior capacity might have been tempted to do), considered only what light others would view it in, and pronounced her decision according to the prevailing rules and maxims of the world.

"When old Dr. —— married his housemaid,

¹ Frances Reynolds, the younger sister of Sir Joshua; she was a bad, but persistent painter, and her brother said of her pictures, that "they made everybody else laugh and him cry." She died in 1807. [ED.]

² This may probably have been the elder daughter of Admiral Cotterell, with whose family the Reynoldses were intimate. [ED.]

Sterne, on hearing of it, exclaimed, 'Ay, I always thought him a genius, and now I'm sure of it!' The truth was (and this was what Sterne meant), that Dr. —— saw a thousand virtues in this woman which nobody else did, and could give a thousand reasons for his choice, that no one about him had the wit to answer: but nature took its usual course, and the event turned out as he had been forewarned, according to the former experience of the world in such matters. His being in the wrong did not prove him to be less a genius, though it might impeach his judgment or prudence. He was, in fact, wiser, and saw more of the matter than any one of his neighbours, who might advise him to the contrary; but he was not so wise as the collective experience or common sense of mankind on the subject, which his more cautious friends merely echoed.

“It is only the man of genius who has any right or temptation to make a fool of himself, by setting up his own unsupported decision against that of the majority. He feels himself superior to any individual in the crowd, and therefore rashly undertakes to act in defiance of the whole mass of prejudice and opinion opposed to him. It is safe and easy to travel in a stage-coach from London to Salisbury: but it would require great strength, boldness, and sagacity to go in a straight line across the country.”

CONVERSATION THE THIRD

NORTHCOTE began by saying, "You don't much like Sir Joshua, I know ; but I think that is one of your prejudices. If I was to compare him with Vandyke and Titian, I should say that Vandyke's portraits are like pictures (very perfect ones, no doubt), Sir Joshua's like the reflection in a looking-glass, and Titian's like the real people. There is an atmosphere of light and shade about Sir Joshua's, which neither of the others has in the same degree, together with a vagueness that gives them a visionary and romantic character, and makes them seem like dreams or vivid recollections of persons we have seen. I never could mistake Vandyke's for anything but pictures, and I go up to them to examine them as such ; when I see a fine Sir Joshua, I can neither suppose it to be a mere picture nor a man ; and I almost involuntarily turn back to ascertain if it is not some one behind me reflected in the glass : when I see a Titian, I am riveted to it, and I can no more take my eye off from it, than if it were the very individual in the room.

"That," he said, "is, I think, peculiar to Titian,

that you feel on your good behaviour in the presence of his keen-looking heads, as if you were before company." I mentioned that I thought Sir Joshua more like Rembrandt than like either Titian or Vandyke: he enveloped objects in the same brilliant haze of a previous mental conception.

"Yes," he said; "but though Sir Joshua borrowed a great deal, he drew largely from himself: or rather, it was a strong and peculiar feeling of nature working in him and forcing its way out in spite of all impediments, and that made whatever he touched his own. In spite of his deficiency in drawing, and his want of academic rules and a proper education, you see this breaking out like a devil in all his works. It is this that has stamped him. There is a charm in his portraits, a mingled softness and force, a grasping at the end with nothing harsh or unpleasant in the means, that you will find nowhere else. He may go out of fashion for a time: but you must come back to him again, while a thousand imitators and academic triflers are forgotten. This proves him to have been a real genius.

"The same thing, however, made him a very bad master. He knew nothing of rules which are alone to be taught; and he could not communicate his instinctive feeling of beauty or character to others. I learnt nothing from him while I was with him: and none of his scholars (if I may except myself) ever made any figure at all. He only gave us his pictures to copy. Sir Joshua undoubtedly got his

first ideas of the art from Gandy,¹ though he lost them under Hudson; but he easily recovered them afterwards. That is a picture of Gandy's there (pointing to a portrait of a little girl). If you look into it, you will find the same broken surface and varying outline, that was so marked a characteristic of Sir Joshua. There was nothing he hated so much as a distinct outline, as you see it in Mengs and the French school. Indeed, he ran into the opposite extreme; but it is one of the great beauties of art to show it waving and retiring, now losing and then recovering itself again, as it always does in nature, without any of that stiff, edgy appearance, which only pedants affect or admire.

“Gandy was never out of Devonshire: but his portraits are common there. His father was patronised by the Duke of Ormond, and one reason why the son never came out of his native county was, that when the Duke of Ormond was implicated in the rebellion to restore the Pretender in 1715, he affected to be thought too deep in his Grace's confidence and a person of too much consequence to venture up to London, so that he chose to remain in a voluntary exile.”

I asked Northcote if he remembered the name of Stringer² at the Academy, when he first came

¹ William Gandy, the portrait-painter, who died in 1729. Northcote gives further particulars with regard to the effect of Gandy's pictures on the mind of Sir J. Reynolds in the Appendix to the Life of the latter. [ED.]

² Daniel Stringer, a Cheshire portrait-painter, who entered the Royal Academy as a student about 1770. [ED.]

up to town. He said he did, and that he drew very well, and once put the figure for him in a better position to catch the foreshortening. He inquired if I knew anything about him, and I said I had once vainly tried to copy a head of a youth by him admirably drawn and coloured, and in which he had attempted to give the effect of double vision by a second outline accompanying the contour of the face and features. Though the design might not be in good taste, it was executed in a way that made it next to impossible to imitate. I called on him afterwards at his house at Knutsford, where I saw some spirited comic sketches in an unfinished state,¹ and a capital female figure by Cignani. All his skill and love of art had, I found, been sacrificed to his delight in Cheshire ale and the company of country squires. Tom Kershaw, of Manchester, used to say, that he would rather have been Dan Stringer than Sir Joshua Reynolds at twenty years of age. Kershaw, like other North-country critics, thought more of the executive power than of the *æsthetical* faculty; forgetting that it signifies comparatively little how well you execute a thing, if it is not worth executing.

In consequence of something that was said of the egotism of artists, he observed, "I am sometimes thought cold and cynical myself; but I hope it is not from any such overweening opinion of myself.—I

¹ One of "the blacksmith swallowing the tailor's news," from Shakspeare. [HAZLITT.]

remember once going with Wilkie to Angerstein's, and because I stood looking and said nothing, he seemed dissatisfied, and said, 'I suppose you are too much occupied with admiring, to give me your opinion?' And I answered hastily, 'No, indeed! I was saying to myself, "And is this all that the art can do?"' But this was not, I am sure, an expression of triumph, but of mortification at the defects which I could not help observing even in the most accomplished works. I knew they were the best, but I could have wished them to be a hundred times better than they were."

Northcote mentioned a conceited painter of the name of Edwards,¹ who went with Romney to Rome; and when they got into the Sistine Chapel, turning round to him, said, "'Egad! George, we're bit!"—He then spoke of his own journey to Rome, of the beauty of the climate, of the manners of the people, of the imposing effect of the Roman Catholic religion, of its favourableness to the fine arts, of the churches full of pictures, of the manner in which he passed his time, studying and looking into all the rooms in the Vatican: he had no fault to find with Italy, and no wish to leave it. "Gracious and sweet was all he saw in her!"

As he talked, he looked as if he saw the different objects pass before him, and his eye glittered with familiar recollections. He said,

¹ Edward Edwards, A.R.A., who had died in 1806. His visit to Rome took place in 1775. [ED.]

Raphael did not scorn to look out of himself or to be beholden to others. He took whole figures from Masaccio to enrich his designs, because all he wanted was to advance the art and ennoble human nature. After he saw Michael Angelo, he improved in freedom and breadth ; and if he had lived to see Titian, he would have done all he could to avail himself of his colouring. All his works are an effusion of the sweetness and dignity of his own character. He did not know how to make a picture ; but for the conduct of the fable and the development of passion and feeling (noble but full of tenderness) there is nobody like him. This is why Hogarth can never come into the lists. He does not lift us above ourselves : our curiosity may be gratified by seeing what men are, but our pride must be soothed by seeing them made better.

Why else is Milton preferred to Hudibras, but because the one aggrandises our notions of human nature, and the other degrades it? Who will make any comparison between a Madonna of Raphael and a drunken prostitute by Hogarth? Do we not feel more respect for an inspired Apostle than for a blackguard in the streets? Raphael points out the highest perfection of which the human form and faculties are capable, and Hogarth their lowest degradation or most wretched perversion. Look at his attempts to paint the good or beautiful, and you see how faint the impressions of these were in his mind. Yet these are what

every one must wish to cherish in his own bosom, and must feel most thankful for to those who lend him the powerful assistance of their unrivalled conceptions of true grandeur and beauty. Sir Joshua strove to do this in his portraits, and this it was that raised him in public estimation; for we all wish to get rid of defects and peculiarities as much as we can. He then said of Michael Angelo, he did not wonder at the fame he had acquired. You are to consider the state of the art before his time, and that he burst through the mean and little manner even of such men as Leonardo da Vinci and Pietro Perugino and through the trammels that confined them, and gave all at once a gigantic breadth and expansion that had never been seen before, so that the world were struck with it as with a display of almost supernatural power, and have never ceased to admire since. We are not to compare it with the examples of art that have followed since, and that would never have existed but for him, but with those that preceded it.

He found fault with the figure of the flying monk in the St. Peter Martyr, as *fluttering* and theatrical, but agreed with me in admiring this picture and in my fondness for Titian in general. He mentioned his going with Prince Hoare and Day¹ to take leave of some fine portraits of Titian's that hung in a dark corner of a gallery at Naples; and as Day looked

¹ Alexander Day, a picture-dealer who lived in Italy, and exported works of art into England. He survived until 1841. [ED.]

at them for the last time with tears in his eyes, he said "Ah! he was a fine old *mouser!*"—I said, I had repeated this expression (which I had heard him allude to before) somewhere in writing, and was surprised that people did not know what to make of it. Northcote said, "Why, that is exactly what I should have thought. There is the difference between writing and speaking. In writing, you address the average quantity of sense or information in the world; in speaking, you pick your audience, or at least know what they are prepared for, or else previously explain what you think necessary. *You* understand the epithet because you have seen a great number of Titian's pictures, and know that cat-like, watchful, penetrating look he gives to all his faces, which nothing else expresses, perhaps, so well as the phrase Day made use of: but the world in general know nothing of this; all they know or believe is, that Titian is a great painter like Raphael or any other famous person. Suppose any one was to tell you, Raphael was a fine old mouser: would you not laugh at this as absurd? And yet the other is equally nonsense or incomprehensible to them. No, there is a limit, a conversational licence which you cannot carry into writing. This is one difficulty I have in writing: I do not know the point of familiarity at which I am to stop; and yet I believe I have ideas, and you say I know how to express myself in talking."

I inquired if he remembered much of Johnson,

Burke, and that set of persons? He said, Yes, a good deal, as he had often seen them. Burke came into Sir Joshua's painting-room one day, when Northcote, who was then a young man, was sitting for one of the children in Count Ugolino. (It is the one in profile with the hand to the face.) He was introduced as a pupil of Sir Joshua's, and, on his looking up, Mr. Burke said, "Then I see that Mr. Northcote is not only an artist, but has a head that would do for Titian to paint."—Goldsmith and Burke had often violent disputes about politics; the one being a staunch Tory, and the other at that time a Whig and outrageous anti-courtier. One day he came into the room, when Goldsmith was there, full of ire and abuse against the late king, and went on in such a torrent of the most unqualified invective that Goldsmith threatened to leave the room. The other, however, persisted; and Goldsmith went out, unable to bear it any longer. So much for Mr. Burke's pretended consistency and uniform loyalty!

When Northcote first came to Sir Joshua, he wished very much to see Goldsmith; and one day Sir Joshua, on introducing him, asked why he had been so anxious to see him? "Because," said Northcote, "he is a *notable*¹ man." This expression, *notable*, in its ordinary sense, was so contrary to Goldsmith's character, that they both burst out a-laughing very heartily. Goldsmith was two thousand pounds in

¹ That is, a *remarkable* man. [HAZLITT.]

debt at the time of his death, which was hastened by his chagrin and distressed circumstances: and when *She Stoops to Conquer* was performed, he was so choked all dinner-time that he could not swallow a mouthful. A party went from Sir Joshua's to support it. The present title was not fixed upon till that morning. Northcote went with Ralph, Sir Joshua's man, into the gallery, to see how it went off; and after the second act, there was no doubt of its success. Northcote says, people had a great notion of the literary parties at Sir Joshua's. He once asked Lord B—— to dine with Dr. Johnson and the rest; but though a man of rank and also of good information, he seemed as much alarmed at the idea as if you had tried to force him into one of the cages at Exeter-Change.

Northcote remarked that he thought people of talents had their full share of admiration. He had seen young ladies of quality, Lady Marys and Lady Dorothys, peeping into a room where Mrs. Siddons was sitting, with all the same timidity and curiosity as if it were some preternatural being—he was sure more than if it had been the Queen. He then made some observations on the respect paid to rank, and said, “However ridiculous it might seem, it was no more than the natural expression of the highest respect in other cases. For instance, as to that of bowing out of the King's presence backwards, would you not do the same if you were introduced to Dr. Johnson for the first time? You would contrive not

to turn your back upon him, till you were out of the room."

He said, "You violent politicians make more rout about royalty than it is worth: it is only the highest place, and somebody must fill it, no matter who: neither do the persons themselves think so much of it as you imagine. They are glad to get into privacy as much as they can. Nor is it a sinecure. The late King (I have been told) used often to have to sign his name to papers, and do nothing else for three hours together, till his fingers fairly ached, and then he would take a walk in the garden, and come back to repeat the same drudgery for three hours more. So, when they told Louis XV. that if he went on with his extravagance, he would bring about a Revolution and be sent over to England with a pension, he merely asked, 'Do you think the pension would be a pretty good one?'"

He noticed the *Memoirs of Cardinal de Retz*, and praised them for their extreme vivacity and great insight into human nature. Once when the mob had besieged the palace, and the Cardinal was obliged to go and appease them, a brickbat was flung at him and knocked him down, and one of the assailants presenting a bayonet at his throat, he suddenly called out, "Oh, you wretch! if your father could have seen you in this barbarous action, what would he have said?" The man immediately withdrew, though, says the Cardinal, "I knew no more of his father than the babe unborn." Northcote

then adverted to the talent of players for drollery and sudden shifts and expedients, and said that by living in an element of comic invention, they imbibed a portion of it.

He repeated that jest of F. Reynolds, who filled up the blank in a militia paper that was sent him with the description, "Old, lame, and a coward;" and another story told of Mathews, the comedian, who, being left in a room with an old gentleman and a little child, and the former putting the question to it, "Well, my dear, which do you like best, the dog or the cat?" by exercising his powers of ventriloquism, made the child seem to answer, "I don't care a damn for either,"—to the utter confusion of the old gentleman, who immediately took the father to task for bringing up his son in such profaneness and total want of common humanity.

He then returned to the question of the inconsistent and unreasonable expectations of mankind as to their success in different pursuits, and answered the common complaint, "What a shame it was that Milton only got thirteen pounds nine shillings and sixpence for *Paradise Lost*." He said, "Not at all; he did not write it to get money, he had gained what he had proposed by writing it, not thirteen pounds nine shillings and sixpence, but an immortal reputation. When Dr. Johnson was asked why he was not invited out to dine as Garrick was, he answered, as if it was a triumph to him, 'Because great lords and ladies don't like to have their mouths stopped!' But

who *does* like to have their mouths stopped? Did he, more than others? People like to be amused in general; but they did not give him the less credit for wisdom and a capacity to instruct them by his writings.

“In like manner, it has been said, that the King only sought one interview with Dr. Johnson; whereas, if he had been a buffoon or a sycophant, he would have asked for more. No, there was nothing to complain of: it was a compliment paid by rank to letters, and once was enough. The King was more afraid of this interview than Dr. Johnson was; and went to it as a schoolboy to his task. But he did not want to have this trial repeated every day, nor was it necessary. The very jealousy of his self-love marked his respect: and if he had thought less of Dr. Johnson, he would have been more willing to risk the encounter. They had each their place to fill, and would best preserve their self-respect, and perhaps their respect for each other, by remaining in their proper sphere. So they make an outcry about the Prince leaving Sheridan to die in absolute want. He had left him long before: was he to send every day to know if he was dying? These things cannot be helped, without exacting too much of human nature.”

I agreed to this view of the subject, and said, I did not see why literary people should repine if they met with their deserts in their own way, without expecting to get rich; but that they often

got nothing for their pains but unmerited abuse and party obloquy.—“Oh, it is not party-spite,” said he, “but the envy of human nature. Do you think to distinguish yourself with impunity? Do you imagine that your superiority will be delightful to others? Or that they will not strive all they can, and to the last moment, to pull you down? I remember myself once saying to Opie, how hard it was upon the poor author or player to be hunted down for not succeeding in an innocent and laudable attempt, just as if they had committed some heinous crime! And he answered, ‘They *have* committed the greatest crime in the eyes of mankind, that of pretending to a superiority over them!’ Do you think that party abuse, and the running down particular authors is anything new? Look at the manner in which Pope and Dryden were assailed by a set of reptiles. Do you believe the modern periodicals had not their prototypes in the party-publications of that day? Depend upon it, what you take for political cabal and hostility is (nine parts in ten) private pique and malice oozing out through those authorised channels.”

We now got into a dispute about nicknames; and H—me¹ coming in and sitting down at my elbow, my old pugnacious habit seemed to return upon me. Northcote contended, that they had always an appropriate meaning: and I said, “Their whole force consisted in their having absolutely none but the

¹ Perhaps Joseph Hume, then M.P. for the Border Burghs, and prominent in Radical politics. [ED.]

most vague and general.”—“Why,” said Northcote, “did my father give me the name of ‘Fat Jack,’ but because I was lean?” He gave an instance which I thought made against himself, of a man at Plymouth, a baker by profession, who had got the name of *Tiddydoll*—he could not tell how. “Then,” said I, “it was a name without any sense or meaning.”—“Be that as it may,” said Northcote, “it almost drove him mad. The boys called after him in the street, besieged his shop windows; even the soldiers took it up, and marched to parade, beating time with their feet, and repeating, *Tiddydoll, Tiddydoll*, as they passed by his door. He flew out upon them at the sound with inextinguishable fury, and was knocked down and rolled in the kennel, and got up in an agony of rage and shame, his white clothes covered all over with mud. A gentleman, a physician in the neighbourhood, one day called him in and remonstrated with him on the subject. He advised him to take no notice of his persecutors. ‘What,’ he said, ‘does it signify? Suppose they were to call me *Tiddydoll*?’—‘There,’ said the man, ‘you called me so yourself; you only sent for me in to insult me!’ and, after heaping every epithet of abuse upon him, flew out of the house in a most ungovernable passion.”

I told Northcote this was just the thing I meant. Even if a name had confessedly no meaning, by applying it constantly and by way of excellence to another, it seemed as if he must be an abstraction of insignificance: whereas, if it pointed to any posi-

tive defect or specific charge, it was at least limited to the one, and you stood a chance of repelling the other. The virtue of a nickname consisted in its being indefinable and baffling all proof or reply.

When H—me was gone, Northcote extolled his proficiency in Hebrew, which astonished me not a little, as I had never heard of it. I said, he was a very excellent man, and a good specimen of the character of the old Presbyterians, who had more of the idea of an attachment to principle, and less of an obedience to fashion or convenience, from their education and tenets, than any other class of people. Northcote assented to this statement, and concluded by saying, that H—me was certainly a very good man, and had no fault but that of not being fat.

CONVERSATION THE FOURTH

NORTHCOTE said, he had been reading Kelly's *Reminiscences*. I asked what he thought of them? He said, they were the work of a well-meaning man, who fancied all those about him good people, and everything they uttered clever. I said, I recollected his singing formerly with Mrs. Crouch, and that he used to give great effect to some things of sentiment, such as "Oh! had I been by fate decreed," etc., in *Love in a Village*.¹ Northcote said, he did not much like him: there was a jerk, a kind of *brogue* in his singing; though he had, no doubt, considerable advantages in being brought up with all the great singers and having performed on all the first stages in Italy.

I said, there was no echo of all that now. "No," said Northcote, "nor in my time, though I was there just after him. He asked me once, many years ago, if I had heard of him in Italy, and I said no, though I excused myself by stating that I had only been at Rome, where the stage was less an object, the Pope

¹ The comic opera by Isaac Bickerstaffe, brought out at Covent Garden in 1762, and long extremely popular. [ED.]

there performing the chief part himself." I answered, that I meant there was no echo of the fine singing at present in Italy, music being there dead as well as painting, or reduced to mere screaming, noise and rant. "It is odd," he said, "how their genius seems to have left them. Everything of that sort appears to be at present no better than it is with us in a country-town: or rather it wants the simplicity and rustic innocence, and is more like the draggled-tailed finery of a lady's waiting-maid. They have nothing of their own: all is at second hand. Did you see Thorwaldsen's things while you were there? A young artist brought me all his designs the other day, as miracles that I was to wonder at and be delighted with. But I could find nothing in them but repetitions of the Antique, over and over, till I was surfeited."—"He would be pleased at this."—"Why, no! that is not enough: it is easy to imitate the Antique:—if you want to last, you must invent something. The other is only pouring liquors from one vessel into another, that become staler and staler every time.

"We are tired of the Antique; yet, at any rate, it is better than the vapid imitation of it. The world wants something new, and will have it. No matter whether it is better or worse, if there is but an infusion of new life and spirit, it will go down to posterity; otherwise, you are soon forgotten. Canova, too, is nothing for the same reason—he is only a feeble copy of the Antique; or a mixture of

two things the most incompatible, that and operadancing. But there is Bernini; he is full of faults; he has too much of that florid, redundant, fluttering style, that was objected to Rubens; but then he has given an appearance of flesh that was never given before.

“The Antique always looks like marble, you never for a moment can divest yourself of the idea; but go up to a statue of Bernini’s, and it seems as if it must yield to your touch. This excellence he was the first to give, and therefore it must always remain with him. It is true, it is also in the Elgin Marbles; but they were not known in his time; so that he indisputably was a genius. Then there is Michael Angelo; how utterly different from the Antique, and in some things how superior! For instance, there is his statue of Cosmo de Medici, leaning on his hand, in the chapel of St. Lorenzo at Florence; I declare it has that look of reality in it, that it almost terrifies you to be near it. It has something of the same effect as the mixture of life and death that is perceivable in wax-work; though that is a bad illustration, as this last is disagreeable and mechanical, and the other is produced by a powerful and masterly conception.

“It was the same with Handel too: he made music speak a new language, with a pathos and a power that had never been dreamt of till his time. Is it not the same with Titian, Correggio, Raphael? These painters did not imitate one another, but were

as unlike as possible, and yet were all excellent. If excellence were one thing, they must have been all wrong. Still, originality is not caprice or affectation ; it is an excellence that is always to be found in nature, but has never had a place in art before. So Romney said of Sir Joshua, that there was that in his pictures which we had not been used to see in other painters, but we had seen it often enough in nature. Give this in your works, and nothing can ever rob you of the credit of it.

“I was looking into Mandeville¹ since I saw you (I thought I had lost it, but I found it among a parcel of old books). You may judge by that of the hold that anything like originality takes of the world : for though there is a great deal that is questionable and liable to very strong objection, yet they will not give it up, because it is the very reverse of commonplace ; and they must go to that source to learn what can be said on that side of the question. Even if you receive a shock, you feel your faculties roused by it and set on the alert. Mankind do not choose to go to sleep.”

I replied, that I thought this was true, yet at the same time the world seemed to have a wonderful propensity to admire the trite and traditional. I could only account for this from a reflection of our self-love. We could few of us

¹ *The Fable of the Bees ; or, Private Vices Public Benefits*, a cynical and paradoxical treatise in ethics, published by Dr. Bernard de Mandeville in 1725. [ED.]

invent, but most of us could imitate and repeat by rote ; and as we thought we could get up and ride in the same jog-trot machine of learning, we affected to look up to this elevation as the post of honour. Northcote said, "You are to consider that learning is of great use to society ; and though it may not add to the stock, is a necessary vehicle to transmit it to others. Learned men are the cisterns of knowledge, not the fountain-heads. They are only wrong in often claiming respect on a false ground, and mistaking their own province. They are so accustomed to ring the changes on words and received notions, that they lose their perception of things. I remember being struck with this at the time of the Ireland controversy :—only to think of a man like Dr. Parr going down on his knees and kissing the pretended Manuscript ! It was not that he knew or cared anything about Shakspeare (or he would not have been so imposed upon) ; he merely worshipped a name, as a Catholic priest worships the shrine that contains some favourite relic."

I said, the passages in Ireland's play that were brought forward to prove the identity, were the very thing that proved the contrary ; for they were obvious parodies of celebrated passages in Shakspeare, such as that on death in *Richard II.*—"And there the antic sits," etc. Now, Shakspeare never parodied himself ; but these learned critics were only struck with the verbal coincidence, and never thought of the general character or spirit of the writer.

“Or without that,” said Northcote, “who that attended to the common sense of the question would not perceive that Shakspeare was a person who would be glad to dispose of his plays as soon as he wrote them? If it had been such a man as Sir Philip Sidney, indeed, he might have written a play at his leisure, and locked it up in some private drawer at Penshurst, where it might have been found two hundred years after: but Shakspeare had no opportunity to leave such precious hoards behind him, nor place to deposit them in. Tresham¹ made me very mad one day at Cosway’s, by saying they had found a lock of his hair and a picture; and Caleb Whitefoord, who ought to have known better, asked me if I did not think Sheridan a judge, and that *he* believed in the authenticity of the Ireland papers? I said, ‘Do you bring him as a fair witness? He wants to fill his theatre, and would write a play himself, and swear it was Shakspeare’s. He knows better than to cry *stale fish.*’”

I observed, this was what made me dislike the conversation of learned or literary men. I got nothing from them but what I already knew, and hardly that: they poured the same ideas and phrases and cant of knowledge out of books into my ears, as apothecaries’ apprentices made prescriptions out of the same bottles; but there were no new drugs or simples in their *materia medica*. Go to a Scotch

¹ Henry Tresham, R.A., the historical painter (1749-1814).
[Ed.]

professor, and he bores you to death by an eternal rhapsody about rent and taxes, gold and paper currency, population and capital, and the Teutonic Races—all which you have heard a thousand times before: go to a linen-draper in the city, without education but with common sense and shrewdness, and you pick up something new, because nature is inexhaustible, and he sees it from his own point of view, when not cramped and hoodwinked by pedantic prejudices. A person of this character said to me the other day, in speaking of the morals of foreign nations, "It's all a mistake to suppose there can be such a difference, sir: the world are, and must be moral; for when people grow up and get married, they teach their children to be *moral*. No man wishes to have them turn out profligate." I said I had never heard this before, and it seemed to me to be putting society on new rollers. Northcote agreed, it was an excellent observation. I added, this self-taught shrewdness had its weak sides too. The same person was arguing that mankind remained much the same, and always would do so. Cows and horses did not change: and why then should men? He had forgot that cows and horses do not learn to read and write.

"Ay, that was very well too," said Northcote; "I don't know but I agree with him rather than with you. I was thinking of the same thing the other day in looking over an old Magazine, in which there was a long debate on an Act of Parliament to license gin-drinking. The effect was quite droll. There was one person who

made a most eloquent speech to point out all the dreadful consequences of allowing this practice. It would debauch the morals, ruin the health, and dissolve all the bonds of society, and leave a poor, puny, miserable, Liliputian race, equally unfit for peace or war. You would suppose that the world was going to be at an end. Why, no! the answer would have been, the world will go on much the same as before. You attribute too much power to an Act of Parliament. Providence has not taken its measures so ill as to leave it to an Act of Parliament to continue or discontinue the species. If it depended on our wisdom and contrivances whether it should last or not, it would be at an end before twenty years! People are wrong about this; some say the world is getting better, others complain it is getting worse, when, in fact, it is just the same, and neither better nor worse." —What a lesson, I said to myself, for our pragmatistical legislators and idle projectors!

I said, I had lately been led to think of the little real progress that was made by the human mind, and how the same errors and vices revived under a different shape at different periods, from observing just the same humour in our Ultra-reformers at present, and in their predecessors in the time of John Knox. Our modern *wisecres* were for banishing all the fine arts and finer affections, whatever was pleasurable and ornamental, from the Commonwealth, on the score of utility, exactly as the others did on the score of religion. The real motive in either case

was nothing but a sour, envious, malignant disposition, incapable of enjoyment in itself, and averse to every appearance or tendency to it in others. Our peccant humours broke out and formed into what Milton called "a crust of formality" on the surface; and while we fancied we were doing God or man good service, we were only indulging our spleen, self-opinion, and self-will, according to the fashion of the day. The existing race of free-thinkers and sophists would be mortified to find themselves the counterpart of the monks and ascetics of old; but so it was. The dislike of the Westminster Reviewers to polite literature was only the old exploded Puritanic objection to human learning. Names and modes of opinion changed, but human nature was much the same.

"I know nothing of the persons you speak of," said Northcote; "but they must be fools if they expect to get rid of the showy and superficial, and let only the solid and useful remain. The surface is a part of nature, and will always continue so. Besides, how many useful inventions owe their existence to ornamental contrivances! If the ingenuity and industry of man were not tasked to produce luxuries, we should soon be without necessities. We must go back to the savage state. I myself am as little prejudiced in favour of poetry as almost any one can be; but surely there are things in poetry that the world cannot afford to do without. What is of absolute necessity is only a part; and the

next question is, how to occupy the remainder of our time and thoughts (not so employed) agreeably and innocently.

“Works of fiction and poetry are of incalculable use in this respect. If people did not read the Scotch novels, they would not read Mr. Bentham’s philosophy. There is nothing to me more disagreeable than the abstract idea of a Quaker, which falls under the same article. They object to colours; and why do they object to colours? Do we not see that Nature delights in them? Do we not see the same purpose of prodigal and ostentatious display run through all her works? Do we not find the most beautiful and dazzling colours bestowed on plants and flowers, on the plumage of birds, on fishes and shells, even to the very bottom of the sea? All this profusion of ornament, we may be sure, is not in vain. To judge otherwise is to fly in the face of Nature, and substitute an exclusive and intolerant spirit in the place of philosophy, which includes the greatest variety of man’s wants and tastes, and makes all the favourable allowances it can.

“The Quaker will not wear coloured clothes; though he would not have a coat to his back if men had never studied anything but the mortification of their appetites and desires. But he takes care of his personal convenience by wearing a piece of good broadcloth, and gratifies his vanity, not by finery, but by having it of a different cut from everybody else, so that he may seem better

and wiser than they. Yet this humour, too, is not without its advantages: it serves to correct the contrary absurdity. I look upon the Quaker and the fop as two sentinels placed by Nature at the two extremes of vanity and selfishness, and to guard, as it were, all the common sense and virtue that lie between."

I observed that these contemptible narrow-minded prejudices made me feel irritable and impatient. "You should not suffer that," said Northcote; "for then you will run into the contrary mistake, and lay yourself open to your antagonist. The monks, for instance, have been too hardly dealt with—not that I would defend many abuses and instances of oppression in them—but is it not as well to have bodies of men shut up in cells and monasteries, as to let them loose to make soldiers of them and to cut one another's throats? And out of that lazy ignorance and leisure, what benefits have not sprung? It is to them we owe those beautiful specimens of Gothic architecture which can never be surpassed; many of the discoveries in medicine and in mechanics are also theirs; and, I believe, the restoration of classical learning is owing to them.

"Not that I would be understood to say that all or a great deal of this could not have been done without them; but their leisure, their independence, and the want of some employment to exercise their minds were the actual cause of many advantages we now enjoy; and what I mean is, that Nature is satisfied

with imperfect instruments. Instead of snarling at everything that differs from us we had better take Shakspeare's advice, and try to find

“‘Tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.’”

It was at this time that Mr. Northcote read to me the following letter, addressed by him to a very young lady, who earnestly desired him to write a letter to her :—

“MY DEAR MISS K——, What in the world can make you desire a letter from me? Indeed, if I was a fine Dandy of one-and-twenty, with a pair of stays properly padded and also an iron busk, and whiskers under my nose, with my hair standing upright on my head, all in the present fashion, then it might be accounted for, as I might write you a fine answer in poetry about Cupids and burning hearts, and sighs and angels and darts, such a letter as Mr. ——,¹ the poet, might write. But it is long past the time for me to sing love-songs under your window, with a guitar, and catch my death in some cold night, and so die in your service.

“But what has a poor gray-headed old man of eighty got to say to a blooming young lady of eighteen, but to relate to her his illness and pains, and tell her that past life is little better than a dream, and that he finds that all he has been doing is only vanity. Indeed, I may console myself with the pleasure of

¹ The omitted name is, doubtless, “Moore.” [ED.]

having gained the flattering attention of a young lady of such amiable qualities as yourself, and have the honour to assure you, that I am your grateful friend and most obliged humble servant,

“JAMES NORTHCOTE.

“*Argyll Place, 1826.*”

I said, the hardest lesson seemed to be to look beyond ourselves. “Yes,” said Northcote, “I remember when we were young and were making remarks upon the neighbours, an old maiden aunt of ours used to say, ‘I wish to God you could see yourselves!’ And yet, perhaps, after all, this was not very desirable. Many people pass their whole lives in a very comfortable dream, who, if they could see themselves in the glass, would start back with affright. I remember once being at the Academy, when Sir Joshua wished to propose a monument to Dr. Johnson in St. Paul’s, and West got up and said, that the King, he knew, was averse to anything of the kind, for he had been proposing a similar monument in Westminster Abbey for a man of the greatest genius and celebrity—one whose works were in all the cabinets of the curious throughout Europe—one whose name they would all hear with the greatest respect—and then it came out, after a long preamble, that he meant Woollett,¹ who had engraved his *Death of Wolfe*.

¹ William Woollett (1735-1785), one of the engravers who worked for Boydell. The tablet in Westminster Abbey was not merely proposed, but erected. [ED.]

“I was provoked, and I could not help exclaiming, ‘My God! what, do you put him upon a footing with such a man as Dr. Johnson—one of the greatest philosophers and moralists that ever lived? We have thousands of engravers at any time!’—and there was such a burst of laughter at this—Dance, who was a grave gentlemanly man, laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks; and Farington used afterwards to say to me, ‘Why don’t you speak in the Academy, and begin with “My God!” as you do sometimes?’” I said, I had seen in a certain painter something of this humour, who once very good-naturedly showed me a Rubens he had, and observed with great *nonchalance*, “What a pity that this man wanted expression!” I imagined Rubens to have looked round his gallery. “Yet,” he continued, “it is the consciousness of defect, too, that often stimulates the utmost exertions. If Pope had been a fine, handsome man, would he have left those masterpieces that he has? But he knew and felt his own deformity, and therefore was determined to leave nothing undone to extend that corner of power that he possessed. He said to himself, They shall have no fault to find there. I have often thought when very good-looking young men have come here intending to draw, ‘What! are you going to bury yourselves in a garret?’ And it has generally happened that they have given up the art before long, and married or otherwise disposed of themselves.”

I had heard an anecdote of Nelson, that, when

appointed post-captain, and on going to take possession of his ship at Yarmouth, the crowd on the quay almost jostled him, and exclaimed, "What! have they made that little insignificant fellow a captain? He will do much, to be sure!" I thought this might have urged him to dare as he did, in order to get the better of their prejudices and his own sense of mortification. "No doubt," said Northcote, "personal defects or disgrace operate in this way. I knew an admiral who had got the nickname of 'Dirty Dick' among the sailors, and, on his being congratulated on obtaining some desperate victory, all he said was, 'I hope they'll call me Dirty Dick no more!'"

"There was a Sir John Grenville or Greenfield formerly, who was appointed to convoy a fleet of merchant-ships, and had to defend them against a Spanish man-of-war, and did so with the utmost bravery and resolution, so that the convoy got safe off; but after that, he would not yield till he was struck senseless by a ball, and then the crew delivered up the vessel to the enemy, who, on coming on board and entering the cabin where he lay, were astonished to find a mere puny shrivelled spider of a man, instead of the Devil they had expected to see. He was taken on shore in Spain, and died of his wounds there; and the Spanish women afterwards used to frighten their children, by telling them 'Don John of the Greenfield was coming!'"

CONVERSATION THE FIFTH

NORTHCOTE mentioned the death of poor ——,¹ who had been with him a few days before, laughing and in great spirits; and the next thing he heard was that he had put an end to himself. I asked if there was any particular reason? He said, “No; that he had left a note upon the table, saying that his friends had forsaken him, that he knew no cause, and that he was tired of life. His patron, C[roker], of the Admiralty, had, it seems, set him to paint a picture of Louis the Eighteenth receiving the Order of the Garter. He had probably been teased about that. These insipid court-subjects were destined to be fatal to artists. Poor Bird² had been employed to paint a picture of Louis the Eighteenth landing at Calais, and had died of chagrin and disappointment at his

¹ There can be no question that this was the Irish artist, Thomas Foster, who in March 1826, at the age of four-and-twenty, committed suicide. He painted the portrait of John Wilson Croker. [ED.]

² Edward Bird; the event Northcote mentions took place in 1819. [ED.]

failure. Who could make anything of such a figure and such a subject? There was nothing to be done; and yet if the artist added anything of his own, he was called to order by his would-be patrons, as falsifying what appeared to them an important event in history. It was only a person like Rubens who could succeed in such subjects by taking what licenses he thought proper, and having authority enough to dictate to his advisers."

A gentleman came in, who asked if [Foster] was likely to have succeeded in his art? Northcote answered, "There were several things against it. He was good-looking, good-natured, and a wit. He was accordingly asked out to dine, and caressed by those who knew him; and a young man after receiving these flattering marks of attention and enjoying the height of luxury and splendour, was not inclined to return to his painting-room, to brood over a design that would cost him infinite trouble, and the success of which was at last doubtful. Few young men of agreeable persons or conversation turned out great artists. It was easier to look in the glass than to make a dull canvas shine like a lucid mirror; and, as to talking, Sir Joshua used to say, a painter should sew up his mouth. It was only the love of distinction that produced eminence; and if a man was admired for one thing, that was enough. We only work out our way to excellence by being imprisoned in defects. It requires a long apprenticeship, great pains, and prodigious

self-denial, which no man will submit to, except from necessity, or as the only chance he has of escaping from obscurity.

“I remember when Mr. Locke¹ (of Norbury Park) first came over from Italy; and old Dr. Moore, who had a high opinion of him, was crying up his drawings, and asked me, if I did not think he would make a great painter? I said, ‘No, never!’—‘Why not?’—‘Because he has six thousand a year.’ No one would throw away all the advantages and indulgences this ensured him, to shut himself up in a garret to pore over that which after all may expose him to contempt and ridicule. Artists, to be sure, have gone on painting after they have got rich, such as Rubens and Titian, and indeed Sir Joshua; but then it had by this time become a habit and a source of pleasure instead of a toil to them, and the honours and distinction they had acquired by it counterbalanced every other consideration. Their love of the art had become greater than their love of riches or of idleness: but at first this is not the case, and the repugnance to labour is only mastered by the absolute necessity for it. People apply to study only when they cannot help it. No one was ever known to succeed without this stimulus.”

I ventured to say that, generally speaking, no one, I

¹ William Locke (1732-1810) was a collector of pictures and a tolerable amateur. Several good works from the Norbury Park collection, brought from Rome by him, are now in the National Gallery. [ED.]

believed, ever succeeded in a profession without great application; but that where there was a strong turn for anything, a man in this sense could not help himself, and the application followed of course, and was, in fact, comparatively easy. Northcote turned short round upon me, and said, "Then you admit original genius? I cannot agree with you there." I said, "Waiving that, and not inquiring how the inclination comes, but early in life a fondness, a passion for a certain pursuit is imbibed; the mind is haunted by this object, it cannot rest without it (any more than the body without food), it becomes the strongest feeling we have, and then, I think, the most intense application follows naturally, just as in the case of a love of money or any other passion—the most unremitting application without this is forced and of no use; and where this original bias exists, no other motive is required."

"Oh! but," said Northcote, "if you had to labour on by yourself without competitors or admirers, you would soon lay down your pencil or your pen in disgust. It is the hope of shining, or the fear of being eclipsed, that urges you on. Do you think if nobody took any notice of what you did, this would not damp your ardour?"—"Yes; after I had done anything that I thought worth notice, it might considerably: but how many minds (almost all the great ones) were formed in secrecy and solitude, without knowing whether they should ever make a figure or not! All they knew was, that they liked what they were about, and

gave their whole souls to it. There was Hogarth, there was Correggio: what enabled these artists to arrive at the perfection in their several ways, which afterwards gained them the attention of the world? Not the premature applause of the bystanders, but the vivid tingling delight with which the one seized upon a grotesque incident or expression—‘the wrapt soul sitting in the eyes’ of the other, as he drew a saint or angel from the skies. If they had been brought forward very early, before they had served this thorough apprenticeship to their own minds (the opinion of the world apart), it might have damped or made coxcombs of them. It was the love and perception of excellence (or the favouring smile of the Muse) that in my view produced excellence and formed the man of genius. Some, like Milton, had gone on with a great work all their lives with little encouragement but the hope of posthumous fame.”

“It is not that,” said Northcote; “you cannot see so far. It is not those who have gone before you or those who are to come after you, but those who are by your side, running the same race, that make you look about you. What made Titian jealous of Tintoret? Because he stood immediately in his way, and their works were compared together. If there had been a hundred Tintorets a thousand miles off, he would not have cared about them. That is what takes off the edge and stimulus of exertion in old age: those who were our competitors in early life, whom we wished to excel or whose good opinion we were

most anxious about, are gone, and have left us in a manner by ourselves, in a sort of new world, where we know and are as little known as on entering a strange country. Our ambition is cold with the ashes of those whom we feared or loved. I remember old Alderman Boydell¹ using an expression which explained this. Once when I was in the coach with him, in reply to some compliment of mine on his success in life, he said, 'Ah! there was one who would have been pleased at it; but *her* I have lost!' The fine coach and all the city-trappings were nothing to him without his wife, who remembered what he was and the gradations and anxious cares by which he rose to his present affluence, and was a kind of monitor to remind him of his former self and of the different vicissitudes of his fortune."

Northcote then spoke of old Alderman Boydell with great regret, and said, "He was a man of sense and liberality, and a true patron of the art. His nephew, who came after him, had not the same capacity, and wanted to dictate to the artists what they were to do. N. mentioned some instance of his wanting him to paint a picture on a subject for which he was totally unfit, and figures of a size which he had never been accustomed to, and he told him 'he must get somebody else to do it.'" I said, "Booksellers

¹ John Boydell, Northcote's enthusiastic friend and patron, who spent £350,000 on the encouragement of English art. He fell into financial difficulties and died in 1804. [ED.]

and editors had the same infirmity, and always wanted you to express their ideas, not your own. Sir R[ichard] P[hillips]¹ had once gone up to Coleridge, after hearing him talk in a large party, and offered him 'nine guineas a sheet for his conversation !' He calculated that the 'nine guineas a sheet' would be at least as strong a stimulus to his imagination as the wasting his words in a room full of company." NORTHCOTE: "Ay, he came to me once, and wished me to do a work which was to contain a history of art in all countries and from the beginning of the world. I said it would be an invaluable work if it could be done ; but that there was no one alive who could do it."

Northcote afterwards, by some transition, spoke of the characters of women, and asked my opinion. I said, "All my metaphysics leaned to the vulgar side of these questions : I thought there was a difference of original genius, a difference in the character of the sexes, etc. Women appeared to me to do some things better than men ; and therefore I concluded they must do other things worse." Northcote mentioned Annibal Caracci, and said, "How odd it was, that in looking at any work of his, you could swear it was done by a man ! Ludovico Caracci had a finer and more intellectual expression, but not the same bold and workmanlike character. There was Michael Angelo again—what woman would ever have thought of painting the figures in the Sistine chapel ?

¹ The popular bookseller. [ED.]

There was Dryden too, what a thorough manly character there was in his style! And Pope"—[I interrupted, "seemed to me between a man and a woman."}]—"It was not," he continued, "that women were not often very clever (cleverer than many men), but there was a point of excellence which they never reached. Yet the greatest pains had been taken with several. Angelica Kauffman had been brought up from a child to the art, and had been taken by her father (in boy's clothes) to the Academy to learn to draw; but there was an effeminate and feeble look in all her works, though not without merit. There was not the man's hand, or what Fuseli used to call a 'fist' in them; that is, something coarse and clumsy enough, perhaps, but still with strength and muscle. Even in common things, you would see a carpenter drive a nail in a way that a woman never would; or if you had a suit of clothes made by a woman, they would hang quite loose about you and seem ready to fall off.

"Yet it is extraordinary too," said Northcote, "that in what has sometimes been thought the peculiar province of men, courage and heroism, there have been women fully upon a par with any men, such as Joan of Arc, and many others, who have never been surpassed as leaders in battle."

I observed that of all the women I had ever seen or known anything of, Mrs. Siddons struck me as the grandest. He said, "Oh! it is her outward form, which stamps her so completely for tragedy, no less

than the mental part. Both she and her brother were cut out by Nature for a tragedy-king and queen. It is what Mrs. Hannah More has said of her, '*Her's is the afflicted!*'"

I replied, that she seemed to me equally great in anger or in contempt or in any stately part as she was in grief, witness her *Lady Macbeth*. "Yes," he said, "that, to be sure, was a masterpiece." I asked what he thought of Mrs. Inchbald? He said, "Oh! very highly: there was no affectation in her. I once took up her *Simple Story* (which my sister had borrowed from the circulating library) and looking into it, I said, 'My God! what have you got here?' and I never moved from the chair till I had finished it. Her *Nature and Art* is equally fine—the very marrow of genius." She seems to me, I added, like Venus writing books. "Yes, women have certainly been successful in writing novels; and in plays too. I think Mrs. Centlivre's are better than Congreve's. Their letters, too, are admirable: it is only when they put on the breeches and try to write like men, that they become pedantic and tiresome. In giving advice, too, I have often found that they excelled; and when I have been irritated by any trifling circumstance and have laid more stress upon it than it was worth, they have seen the thing in a right point of view and tamed down my asperities."

On this I remarked, that I thought, in general, it might be said that the faculties of women were of a passive character. They judged by the simple effect

upon their feelings, without inquiring into causes. Men had to act; women had the coolness and the advantages of bystanders, and were neither implicated in the theories nor passions of men. While we were proving a thing to be wrong, they would feel it to be ridiculous. I said, I thought they had more of common sense, though less of acquired capacity than men. They were freer from the absurdities of creeds and dogmas, from the virulence of party in religion and politics (by which we strove to show our sense and superiority), nor were their heads so much filled with the lumber of learned folios.

I mentioned as an illustration, that when old Baxter (the celebrated casuist and nonconformist divine) first went to Kidderminster to preach, he was almost pelted by the women for maintaining from the pulpit the then fashionable and orthodox doctrine, that "Hell was paved with infants' skulls." The theory, which the learned divine had piled up on arguments and authorities, is now exploded: the common-sense feeling on the subject, which the women of that day took up in opposition to it as a dictate of humanity, would be now thought the philosophical one.

"Yes," said Northcote, "but this exploded doctrine was knocked down by some man, as it had been set up by one: the women would let things remain as they are, without making any progress in error or wisdom. We do best together: our strength and our weakness mutually correct each other." North-

cote then read me from a manuscript volume lying by him, a character drawn of his deceased wife by a Dissenting Minister (a Mr. Fox, of Plymouth), which is so beautiful that I shall transcribe it here.

“Written by Mr. John Fox, on the death of his wife, who was the daughter of the Rev. Mr. Isaac Gelling.

“My dear wife died, to my unspeakable grief, Dec. 19th, 1762. With the loss of my dear companion died all the pleasure of my life; and no wonder: I had lived with her forty years, in which time nothing happened to abate the strictness of our Friendship, or to create a coolness or indifference so common and even unregarded by many in the world. I thank God I enjoyed my full liberty, my health, such pleasures and diversions as I liked, perfect peace and competence during the time; which were all seasoned and heightened every day more or less by constant marks of friendship, most inviolable affection, and a most cheerful endeavour to make my life agreeable. Nothing disturbed me but her many and constant disorders; under all which I could see how her faithful heart was strongly attached to me. And who could stand the shock of seeing the attacks of Death upon and then her final dissolution? The consequences to me were fatal. Old age rushed upon me like an armed man: my appetite failed, my strength was gone, every amusement became flat and dull; my countenance fell, and I have nothing to do but to

drag on a heavy chain for the rest of my life ; which I hope a good God will enable me to do without murmuring, and in conclusion, to say, with all my soul—

TE DEUM LAUDAMUS.

“This was written on a paper blotted by tears and stuck with wafers into the first page of the family Bible.

“Mr. John Fox died 22nd of October 1763. He was born May 10th, 1693.”

CONVERSATION THE SIXTH

NORTHCOTE alluded to a printed story of his having hung an early picture of H[aydon]'s out of sight, and of Fuseli's observing on the occasion, "By God, you are sending him to heaven before his time!" He said there was not the least foundation for this story; nor could there be, he not having been *hanger* that year. He read out of the same publication a letter from Burke to a young artist of the name of Barrow, full of excellent sense, advising him by no means to give up his profession as an engraver till he was sure he could succeed as a painter, out of idle ambition and an unfounded contempt for the humbler and more laborious walks of life.

"I could not have thought it of him," said Northcote; "I confess he never appeared to me so great a man." I asked what kind of looking man he was? Northcote answered, "You have seen the picture? There was something I did not like; a thinness in the features, and an expression of *hauteur*, though mixed with condescension and the manners of a gentleman. I can't help thinking he had a hand in the Discourses;

that he gave some of the fine, graceful turns ; for Sir Joshua paid a greater deference to him than to anybody else, and put up with freedoms that he would only have submitted to from some peculiar obligation. Indeed, Miss Reynolds used to complain that whenever any of Burke's poor Irish relations came over, they were all poured in upon them to dinner ; but Sir Joshua never took any notice, but bore it all with the greatest patience and tranquillity. To be sure, there was another reason : he expected Burke to write his Life, and for this he would have paid almost any price. This was what made him submit to the intrusions of Boswell, to the insipidity of Malone, and to the magisterial dictation of Burke : he made sure that out of these three one would certainly write his Life, and ensure him immortality that way. He thought no more of the person who actually did write it afterwards than he would have suspected his dog of writing it. Indeed, I wish he could have known ; for it would have been of some advantage to me, and he might have left me something not to dwell on his defects ; though he was as free from them as any man ; but you can make any one ridiculous with whom you live on terms of intimacy.

“I remember an instance of this that happened with respect to old Mr. M[udge], whom you must have heard me speak of, and who was esteemed an idol by Burke, Dr. Johnson, and many others. Sir Joshua wanted to reprint his Sermons and prefix a Life to them, and asked me to get together any particulars I

could learn of him. So I gave him a manuscript account of Mr. M[udge], written by an old school-fellow of his (Mr. Fox, a dissenting minister in the West of England); after which I heard no more of the Life. Mr. M[udge] was in fact a man of extraordinary talents and great eloquence; and by representing in a manner the High-Church notions both of Dr. Johnson and Sir Joshua (for both were inclined the same way) they came to consider him as a sort of miracle of virtue and wisdom. There was, however, something in Mr. Fox's plain account that would strike Sir Joshua, for he had an eye for nature; and he would at once perceive it was nearer the truth than Dr. Johnson's pompous character of him, which was proper only for a tombstone—it was like one of Kneller's portraits,—it would do for anybody!

“That,” said Northcote, “is old Mr. M[udge]’s definition of beauty, which Sir Joshua has adopted in the Discourses—that it is the *medium of form*. For what is a handsome nose? A long nose is not a handsome nose; neither is a short nose a handsome one: it must then be one that is neither long nor short, but in the middle between both. Even Burke bowed to his authority; and Sir Joshua thought him the wisest man he ever knew. Once when Sir Joshua was expressing his impatience at some innovation, and I said, ‘At that rate, the Christian Religion could never have been established:’ ‘Oh!’ he said, ‘Mr. M[udge] has answered that!’ which seemed to satisfy him.”

I made some remark that I wondered he did not come up to London, though the same feeling seemed to belong to other clever men born in Devonshire (as Gandy) whose ambition was confined to their native county, so that there must be some charm in the place. "You are to consider," he replied, "it is almost a peninsula, so that there is no thoroughfare, and people are therefore more stationary in one spot. It is for this reason they necessarily intermarry among themselves, and you can trace the genealogies of families for centuries back; whereas in other places, and particularly here in London, where everything of that kind is jumbled together, you never know who any man's grandfather was. There are country squires and plain gentry down in that part of the world, who have occupied the same estates long before the Conquest (as the Suckbitches in particular,—not a very sounding name), and who look down upon the Courtneys and others as upstarts.

"Certainly, Devonshire for its extent has produced a number of eminent men, Sir Joshua, the Mudges, Dunning, Gay, Lord Chancellor King, Raleigh, Drake, and Sir Richard Granville in Queen Elizabeth's time, who made that gallant defence in an engagement with the Spanish fleet, and was the ancestor of Pope's Lord Lansdowne, 'What Muse for Granville will refuse to sing,' etc. Foster, the celebrated preacher, was also, I believe, from the West of England. He first became popular from the Lord Chancellor Hardwicke stopping in the

porch of his chapel in the Old Jewry out of a shower of rain; and thinking he might as well hear what was going on, he went in, and was so well pleased that he sent all the great folks to hear him, and he was run after as much as Irving has been in our time. An old fellow-student from the country, going to wait on him at his house in London, found a Shakspeare on the window-seat; and remarking the circumstance with some surprise as out of the usual course of clerical studies, the other apologised by saying that he wished to know something of the world, that his situation and habits precluded him from the common opportunities, and that he found no way of supplying the deficiency so agreeable or effectual as looking into a volume of Shakspeare. Pope has immortalised him in the well-known lines—

“‘ Let modest Foster, if he will, excel
Ten Metropolitans in preaching well !’

“Dr. Mudge,¹ the son of Mr. Zachary Mudge, who was a physician, was an intimate friend of my father’s, and I remember him perfectly well. He was one of the most delightful persons I ever knew. Every one was enchanted with his society. It was not wit that he possessed, but such perfect cheerfulness and good humour, that it was like health coming into the room. He was a most agreeable companion, quite natural and unaffected. His reading was the most beautiful

¹ John Mudge, the friend of Johnson and Reynolds; he died in 1791. [ED.]

I have ever heard. I remember his once reading Moore's¹ fable of the *Female Seducers* with such feeling and sweetness that every one was delighted, and Dr. Mudge himself was so much affected that he burst into tears in the middle of it. The family are still respectable, but derive their chief lustre from the first two founders, like clouds that reflect the sun's rays, after he has sunk below the horizon, but in time turn gray and are lost in obscurity!"

I asked Northcote if he had ever happened to meet with a letter of Warburton's in answer to one of Dr. Doddridge's, complimenting the author of the *Divine Legation of Moses* on the evident zeal and earnestness with which he wrote—to which the latter candidly replied, that he wrote with great haste and unwillingness; that he never sat down to compose till the printer's boy was waiting at the door for the manuscript, and that he should never write at all but as a relief to a morbid lowness of spirits, and to drive away uneasy thoughts that often assailed him.²

"That indeed," observed Northcote, "gives a different turn to the statement; I thought at first it was only the common coquetry both of authors and artists, to be supposed to do what excites the admiration of others with the greatest ease and indifference, and almost without knowing what they are about. If what surprises *you* costs them nothing, the wonder is

¹ Dr. John Moore, the author of *Zeluco*. [ED.]

² This very interesting letter will be found in the *Elegant Epistles*. [HAZLITT.]

so much increased. When Michael Angelo proposed to fortify his native city, Florence, and he was desired to keep to his painting and sculpture, he answered that those were his recreations, but what he really understood was architecture. That is what Sir Joshua considers as the praise of Rubens, that he seemed to make a plaything of the art. In fact, the work is never complete unless it has this appearance: and therefore Sir Joshua has laid himself open to criticism, in saying that 'a picture must not only be done well, it must seem to have been done easily.' It cannot be said to be done well, unless it has this look.

“That is the fault of those laboured and timid productions of the modern French and Italian schools; they are the result of such a tedious, petty, mechanical process, that it is as difficult for you to admire as it has been for the artist to execute them. Whereas, when a work seems stamped on the canvas by a blow, you are taken by surprise; and your admiration is as instantaneous and electrical as the impulse of genius which has caused it. I have seen a whole-length portrait by Velasquez, that seemed done while the colours were yet wet; everything was touched in, as it were, by a wish; there was such a power that it thrilled through your whole frame, and you felt as if you could take up the brush and do anything.

“It is this sense of power and freedom which delights and communicates its own inspiration, just as the opposite drudgery and attention to details is painful and disheartening. There was a little picture of one of

the Infants of Spain on horseback, also by Velasquez, which Mr. Agar had,¹ and with which Gainsborough was so transported, that he said in a fit of bravado to the servant who showed it, 'Tell your master I will give him a thousand pounds for that picture.' Mr. Agar began to consider what pictures he could purchase with the money if he parted with this, and at last, having made up his mind, sent Gainsborough word he might have the picture; who not at all expecting this result, was a good deal confused, and declared, however he might admire it, he could not afford to give so large a sum for it."

¹ Now at the Dulwich Gallery. [HAZLITT.]

CONVERSATION THE SEVENTH

NORTHCOTE complained of being unwell, though he said he could hardly expect it to be otherwise at his age. He must think of making up the accounts of his life, such as it had been, though he added (checking himself) that he ought not to say that, for he had had his share of good as well as others. He had been reading in Boccaccio, where it was frequently observed, that "such a one departed this *wretched* life at such a time;"—so that in Boccaccio's time they complained of the wretchedness of life as much as we do.

He alluded to an expression of Coleridge's, which he had seen quoted in a newspaper, and which he thought very fine, "That an old Gothic cathedral always seemed to him like a petrified religion!" Some one asked, Why does he not go and turn Black Monk? Because, I said, he never does anything that he should do. "There are some things," said N., "with respect to which I am in the same state that a blind man is as to colours. Homer is one of these. I am utterly in the dark about it. I can make

nothing of his heroes or his Gods. Whether this is owing to my not knowing the language or to a change of manners, I cannot say."

He was here interrupted by the entrance of the beautiful Mrs. G[wyn],¹ beautiful even in years. She said she had brought him a book to look at. She could not stop, for she had a lady waiting for her below, but she would call in some morning and have a long chat. After she was gone, I remarked how handsome she still was; and he said, "I don't know why she is so kind as to come, except that I am the last link in the chain that connects her with all those she most esteemed when she was young, Johnson, Reynolds, Goldsmith—and remind her of the most delightful period of her life."

I said, Not only so, but you remember what she was at twenty; and you thus bring back to her the triumphs of her youth—that pride of beauty which must be the more fondly cherished as it has no external vouchers, and lives chiefly in the bosom of its once lovely possessor. In her, however, the Graces had triumphed over time; she was one of Ninon de l'Enclos' people, of the list of the Immortals. I could almost fancy the shade of Goldsmith in the room, looking round with complacency.

"Yes," said Northcote, "that is what Sir Joshua used to mention as the severest test of beauty—it was not then *skin-deep* only. She had gone

¹ Mary Horneck, the "Jessamy Bride" of Goldsmith. [ED.]

through all the stages, and had lent a grace to each. There are beauties that are old in a year. Take away the bloom and freshness of youth, and there is no trace of what they were. Their beauty is not grounded in first principles. Good temper is one of the great preservers of the features." I observed, it was the same in the mind as in the body. There were persons of premature ability who soon ran to seed, and others who made no figure till they were advanced in life. I had known several who were very clever at seventeen or eighteen, but who had turned out nothing afterwards. "That is what my father used to say, that at that time of life the effervescence and intoxication of youth did a great deal, but that we must wait till the gaiety and dance of the animal spirits had subsided to see what people really were.

"It is wonderful" (said Northcote, reverting to the former subject) "what a charm there is in those early associations, in whatever recalls that first dawn and outset of life. *Jack-the-Giant-Killer* is the first book I ever read, and I cannot describe the pleasure it gives me even now. I cannot look into it without my eyes filling with tears. I do not know what it is (whether good or bad), but it is to me, from early impressions, the most heroic of performances. I remember once not having money to buy it, and I transcribed it all out with my own hand. This is what I was going to say about Homer. I cannot help thinking that one cause of the high

admiration in which it is held is its being the first book that is put into the hands of young people at school: it is the first spell which opens to them the enchantments of the unreal world. Had I been bred a scholar, I daresay Homer would have been my Jack-the-Giant-Killer!—There is an innocence and simplicity in that early age which makes everything relating to it delightful. It seems to me that it is the absence of all affectation or even of *consciousness*, that constitutes the perfection of nature or art. That is what makes it so interesting to see girls and boys dancing at school—there is such natural gaiety and freedom, such unaffected, unpretending, unknown grace. That is the true dancing, and not what you see at the Opera. And again, in the most ordinary actions of children, what an ease, what a playfulness, what flames of beauty do they throw out without being in the smallest degree aware of it! I have sometimes thought it a pity there should be such a precious essence, and that those who possess it should be quite ignorant of it: yet if they knew it, that alone would kill it! The whole depends on the utter absence of all egotism, of the remotest reflection upon self.

“It is the same in works of art—the simplest are the best. That is what makes me hate those *stuffed* characters that are so full of themselves that I think they cannot have much else in them. A man who admires himself prevents me from admiring him, just as by praising himself he stops my mouth;

though the vulgar take their cue from a man's opinion of himself, and admire none but coxcombs and pedants. This is the best excuse for impudence and quackery, that the world will not be gained without it. The true favourites of Nature, however, have their eyes turned towards the Goddess, instead of looking at themselves in the glass. There is no pretence or assumption about them. It seems difficult indeed for any one who is the object of attention to others not to be thinking of himself: but the greatest men have always been the most free from this bias, the weakest have been the soonest puffed up by self-conceit. If you had asked Correggio why he painted as he did, he would have answered, 'Because he could not help it.'

"Look at Dryden's verses, which he wrote just like a schoolboy who brings up his task without knowing whether he shall be rewarded or flogged for it. Do you suppose he wrote the description of Cymon for any other reason than because he could not help it, or that he had any more power to stop himself in his headlong career than the mountain-torrent? Or turn to Shakspeare, who evidently does not know the value, the *dreadful* value (as I may say) of the expressions he uses. Genius gathers up its beauties, like the child, without knowing whether they are weeds or flowers: those productions that are destined to give forth an everlasting odour, grow up without labour or design."

Mr. P[atmore]¹ came in, and complimenting Northcote on a large picture he was about, the latter said, It was his last great work : he was getting too old for such extensive undertakings. His friend replied, that Titian went on painting till near a hundred. "Ay," said Northcote, "but he had the Devil to help him, and I have never been able to retain him in my service. It is a dreadful thing to see an immense blank canvas spread out before you to commit sins upon." Something was said of the Academy, and P[atmore] made answer, "I know your admiration of corporate bodies."

N[orthcote] said, "They were no worse than others ; they all began well and ended ill. When the Academy first began, one would suppose that the Members were so many angels sent from heaven to fill the different situations, and that was the reason why it began : now the difficulty was to find anybody fit for them, and the deficiency was supplied by interest, intrigue, and cabal. Not that I object to the individuals neither. As Swift said, I like Jack, Tom, and Harry very well by themselves ; but all together, they are not to be endured. We see the effect of people acting in concert in animals (for men are only a more vicious sort of animals) : a single dog will let you kick and cuff him as you please, and will submit to any treatment ; but if you meet a pack of hounds, they will set upon you and tear you to pieces with the greatest impudence."

¹ P. G. Patmore, the father of the poet, and the author of *My Friends and Acquaintance*. [ED.]

P[atmore]: "The same complaint was made of the Academy in Barry's time, which is now thirty or forty years ago."¹ NORTHCOTE: "Oh! yes, they very soon degenerated. It is the same in all human institutions. The thing is, there has been no way found yet to keep the Devil out. It will be a curious thing to see whether that experiment of the American Government will last. If it does, it will be the first instance of the kind."

P[atmore]: "I should think not. There is something very complicated and mysterious in the mode of their Elections, which I am given to understand are managed in an underhand manner by the leaders of parties; and besides, in all governments the great *desideratum* is to combine activity with a freedom from selfish passions. But it unfortunately happens that in human life, the selfish passions are the strongest and most active; and on this rock society seems to split. There is a certain period in a man's life when he is at his best (when he combines the activity of youth with the experience of manhood), after which he declines; and perhaps it may be the same with states. Things are not best in the beginning or at the end, but in the middle, which is but a point."

NORTHCOTE: "Nothing stands still; it therefore either grows better or worse. When a thing has reached its utmost perfection, it then

¹ Barry's Letter to the Dilettanti Society, enumerating his grievances, was published in 1798. [HAZLITT.]

borders on excess; and excess leads to ruin and decay."

Lord G. had bought a picture of Northcote's: an allusion was made to his enormous and increasing wealth. Northcote said he could be little the better for it. After a certain point, it became a mere nominal distinction. He only thought of that which passed through his hands and fell under his immediate notice. He knew no more of the rest than you or I did: he was merely perplexed by it. This was what often made persons in his situation tenacious of the most trifling sums, for this was the only positive or tangible wealth they had: the remote contingency was like a thing in the clouds, or mountains of silver and gold seen in the distant horizon. It was the same with Nollekens:¹ he died worth £200,000: but the money he had accumulated at his banker's was out of his reach and contemplation—*out of sight, out of mind*—he was only muddling about with what he had in his hands, and lived like a beggar in actual fear of want.

P[atmore] said, he was an odd little man, but he believed clever in his profession. Northcote assented, and observed "he was an instance of what might be done by concentrating the attention on a single object. If you collect the rays of the sun in a

¹ Joseph Nollekens, R.A. (1737-1823), one of the most gifted of English iconic sculptors. He was a man of eccentric habits, and is the hero of a singularly caustic and entertaining biography, by his assistant, John T. Smith. [Ed.]

focus, you could set any object on fire. Great talents were often dissipated to no purpose: but time and patience conquered everything. Without them, you could do nothing. So Giardini, when asked how long it would take to learn to play on the fiddle, answered, 'Twelve hours a day for twenty years together.' A few great geniuses may trifle with the arts, like Rubens; but in general nothing can be more fatal than to suppose oneself a great genius." P[atmore] observed, that in common business those who gave up their whole time and thoughts to any pursuit generally succeeded in it, though far from bright men: and we often found those who had acquired a name for some one excellence, people of moderate capacity in other respects. After Mr. P[atmore] was gone, Northcote said he was one of the persons of the soundest judgment he had ever known, and like Mr. P[rince] H[oare]¹ the least liable to be imposed upon by appearances. Northcote made the remark that he thought it improper in any one to refuse lending a favourite picture for public exhibition, as it seemed not exclusively to belong to one person. A jewel of this value belongs rather to the public than to the individual. Consider the multitudes you deprive of an advantage they cannot receive again: the idle of amusement, the studious of instruction and improvement.

I said, this kind of indifference to the wishes of the public was *sending the world to Coventry!* We

¹ Prince Hoare (1755-1834), the artist and dramatist. [ED.]

then spoke of a celebrated courtier, of whom I said I was willing to believe everything that was amiable, though I had some difficulty, while thinking of him, to keep the *valet* out of my head. NORTHCOTE: "He has certainly endeavoured to behave well; but there is no altering character. I myself might have been a courtier if I could have cringed and held my tongue; but I could no more exist in that element than a fish out of water. At one time I knew Lord R. and Lord H. S——, who were intimate with the Prince, and recommended my pictures to him. Sir Joshua once asked me, 'What do you know of the Prince of [Wales], that he so often speaks to me about you?' I remember I made him laugh by my answer, for I said, 'Oh! he knows nothing of me, nor I of him—it's only his *bragging!*'—'Well,' said he, 'that is spoken like a King!'" . . .

It was to-day I asked leave to write down one or two of these Conversations: he said, "I might, if I thought it worth while; but I do assure you that you overrate them. You have not lived enough in society to be a judge. What is new to you, you think will seem so to others. To be sure, there is one thing, I have had the advantage of having lived in good society myself. I not only passed a great deal of my younger days in the company of Reynolds, Johnson, and that circle, but I was brought up among the Mudges, of whom Sir Joshua (who was certainly used to the most brilliant society of the metropolis) thought so highly, that he

had them at his house for weeks, and even sometimes gave up his own bedroom to receive them. Yet they were not thought superior to several other persons at Plymouth, who were distinguished, some for their satirical wit, others for their delightful fancy, others for their information or sound sense, and with all of whom my father was familiar when I was a boy. Really after what I recollect of these, some of the present people appear to me mere wretched pretenders, muttering out their own emptiness."

I said, We had a specimen of Lord Byron's *Conversations*. NORTHCOTE: "Yes; but he was a tyrant, and a person of that disposition never learns anything, because he will only associate with inferiors. If, however, you think you can make anything of it and can keep clear of personalities, I have no objection to your trying; only I think after the first attempt, you will give it up as turning out quite differently from what you expected."

CONVERSATION THE EIGHTH

NORTHCOTE spoke again of Sir Joshua, and said, he was in some degree ignorant of what might be called the *grammatical* part of the art, or scholarship of academic skill ; but he made up for it by an eye for nature, or rather by a feeling of harmony and beauty. Dance¹ (he that was afterwards Sir Nathaniel Holland) drew the figure well, gave a strong likeness and a certain studied air to his portraits ; yet they were so stiff and forced that they seemed as if put into a *vice*. Sir Joshua, with the defect of proportion and drawing, threw his figures into such natural and graceful attitudes, that they might be taken for the very people sitting or standing there. An arm might be too long or too short, but from the apparent ease of the position he had chosen, it looked like a real arm and neither too long nor too short. The mechanical measure-

¹ Nathaniel Dance, R.A., who at the age of fifty-five married a rich widow, resigned art and his membership, went in for politics, and was made a baronet. He is said to have destroyed all of his pictures that he could collect, being determined to wipe out the stigma of having once been that low thing, an artist. [ED.]

ments might be wrong: the general conception of nature and character was right; and this, which he felt most strongly himself, he conveyed in a corresponding degree to the spectator. Nature is not one thing, but a variety of things, considered under different points of view; and he who seizes forcibly and happily on any one of these, does enough for fame. He will be the most popular artist, who gives that view with which the world in general sympathise. A merely professional reputation is not very extensive, nor will it last long.

W[est], who prided himself on his drawing, had no idea of anything but a certain rigid *outline*, never considering the use of the limbs in moving, the effects of light and shade, etc., so that his figures, even the best of them, look as if cut out of wood. Therefore no one now goes to see them: while Sir Joshua's are as much sought after as ever, from their answering to a feeling in the mind, though deficient as literal representations of external nature. Speaking of artists who were said, in the cant of connoisseurship, to be jealous of their outline, he said, "Rembrandt was not one of these. He took good care to lose it as fast as he could." Northcote then spoke of the breadth of Titian, and observed, that though particularly in his early pictures, he had finished highly and copied everything from nature, this never interfered with the general effect, there was no confusion or littleness: he threw such a broad light on the objects, that everything was seen in

connection with the masses and in its place. He then mentioned some pictures of his own, some of them painted forty years ago, that had lately sold very well at a sale at Plymouth: he was much gratified at this, and said it was almost like looking out of the grave to see how one's reputation got on.

Northcote told an anecdote of Sir George B——,¹ to show the credulity of mankind. When a young man, he put an advertisement in the papers to say that a Mynheer ——, just come over from Germany, had found out a method of taking a likeness much superior to any other by the persons looking into a mirror and having the glass heated so as to bake the impression. He stated this wonderful artist to live at a perfumer's shop in Bond Street, opposite to an hotel where he lodged, and amused himself the next day to see the numbers of people who flocked to have their likenesses taken in this surprising manner. At last, he went over himself to ask for Monsieur ——, and was driven out of the shop by the perfumer in a rage, who said there was no Monsieur —— nor Monsieur *Devil* lived there.

At another time Sir G[eorge] was going in a coach to a tavern with a party of gay young men. The waiter came to the coach-door with a light, and as he was holding this up to the others, those who had already got out went round, and

¹ Possibly Sir George Baker, the Devonshire physician, famous for his successful raid against the leaden vessels used for cider-making. [ED.]

getting in at the opposite coach-door came out again, so that there seemed to be no end of the procession, and the waiter ran into the house, frightened out of his wits. The same story is told of Swift and four clergymen dressed in canonicals.

Speaking of titles, Northcote said, "It was strange what blunders were often made in this way. R[eynolds]¹ (the engraver) had stuck Lord John Boringdon under his print after Sir Joshua—it should be John Lord Boringdon—and he calls the Earl of Carlisle, Lord Carlisle—Lord Carlisle denotes only a Baron. I was once dining at Sir John Leicester's, and a gentleman who was there was expressing his wonder what connection a Prince of Denmark and a Duke of Gloucester could have with Queen Anne, that prints of them should be inserted in a history that he had just purchased of her reign. No other, I said, than that one of them was her son, and the other her husband. The boy died when he was eleven years old of a fever caught at a ball dancing, or he would have succeeded to the throne. He was a very promising youth, though that indeed is what is said of all princes. Queen Anne took his death greatly to heart, and that was the reason why she never would appoint a successor. She wished her brother to come in, rather than the present family. That makes me

¹ Samuel William Reynolds (1773-1835), who was alive when this rather inept criticism on his manners was published, was no relation of Sir Joshua, although he engraved almost all that master's paintings, and closely identified himself with him. [ED.]

wonder, after thrones have been overturned and kingdoms torn asunder to keep the Catholics out, to see the pains that are now taken to bring them in. It was this that made the late King say it was inconsistent with his Coronation Oath. Not that I object to tolerate any religion (even the Jewish), but they are the only one that will not tolerate any other. They are such devils (what with their cunning, their numbers, and their zeal), that if they once get a footing, they will never rest till they get the whole power into their hands. It was but the other day that the Jesuits nearly overturned the empire of China; and if they were obliged to make laws and take the utmost precautions against their crafty encroachments, shall we open a door to them, who have only just escaped out of their hands?"

I said, I had thrown a radical reformer into a violent passion lately by maintaining that the Pope and Cardinals of Rome were a set of as good-looking men as so many Protestant Bishops or Methodist parsons, and that the Italians were the only people who seemed to me to have any faith in their religion as an object of imagination or feeling. My opponent grew almost black in the face, while inveighing against the enormous absurdity of Transubstantiation; it was in vain I pleaded the beauty, innocence, and cheerfulness of the peasant-girls near Rome, who believed in this dreadful superstition, and who thought me *damned* and would probably have been glad to see me burnt at a stake as a heretic.

At length I said, that I thought reason and truth very excellent things in themselves; and that when I saw the rest of the world grow as fond of them as they were of absurdity and superstition, I should be entirely of his way of thinking; but I liked an interest in something (a wafer or a crucifix) better than an interest in nothing. What have philosophers gained by unloosing their hold of the *ideal* world, but to be hooted at and pelted by the rabble, and envied and vilified by one another for want of a common bond of union and interest between them? I just now met the son of an old literary friend in the street, who seemed disposed to *cut* me for some hereditary pique, jealousy, or mistrust. Suppose his father and I had been Catholic priests (saving the *bar-sinister*) how different would have been my reception! He is short-sighted indeed; but had I been a Cardinal, he would have seen me fast enough: the costume alone would have assisted him. Where there is no framework of respectability founded on the *esprit de corps* and on public opinion cemented into a prejudice, the jarring pretensions of individuals fall into a chaos of elementary particles, neutralising each other by mutual antipathy, and soon become the sport and laughter of the multitude. Where the whole is referred to intrinsic, real merit, this creates a standard of conceit, egotism, and envy in every one's own mind, lowering the class, not raising the individual.

A Catholic priest walking along the street is looked

up to as a link in the chain let down from heaven : a poet or philosopher is looked down upon as a poor creature, deprived of certain advantages, and with very questionable pretensions in other respects. Abstract intellect requires the weight of the other world to be thrown into the scale, to make it a match for the prejudices, vulgarity, ignorance, and selfishness of this ! “ You are right,” said Northcote. “ It was Archimedes who said he could move the earth if he had a place to fix his levers on : the priests have always found this *purchase* in the skies. After all, we have not much reason to complain, if they give us so splendid a reversion to look forward to. That is what I said to G[odwin] when he had been trying to unsettle the opinions of a young artist whom I knew. Why should you wish to turn him out of one house, till you have provided another for him ? Besides, what do you know of the matter more than he does ? His nonsense is as good as your nonsense, when both are equally in the dark.

“ As to what your friend said of the follies of the Catholics, I do not think that the Protestants can pretend to be quite free from them. So when a chaplain of Lord Bath's was teasing a Popish clergyman to know how he could make up his mind to admit that absurdity of Transubstantiation, the other made answer, ‘ Why, I'll tell you : when I was young, I was taught to swallow Adam's Apple ; and since that, I have found no difficulty with anything else ! ’ We may say what we will of the

Catholic religion ; but it is more easy to abuse than to overturn it. I have for myself no objection to it but its insatiable ambition, and its being such a dreadful engine of power. It is its very perfection as a system of profound policy and moral influence, that renders it so formidable. Indeed, I have been sometimes suspected of a leaning to it myself ; and when Godwin wrote his *Life of Chaucer*, he was said to have turned Papist from his making use of something I had said to him about confession. I don't know but unfair advantages may be taken of it for state purposes ; but I cannot help thinking it is of signal benefit in the regulation of private life. If servants have cheated or lied or done anything wrong, they are obliged to tell it to the priest, which makes them bear it in mind, and then a certain penance is assigned which they must go through, though they do not like it. All this acts as a timely check, which is better than letting them go on till their vices get head, and then hanging them ! The Great indeed may buy themselves off (as where are they not privileged ?) but this certainly does not apply to the community at large.

“I remember our saying to that old man (a Dominican friar), whose picture you see there, that we wished he could be made a Royal Confessor ; to which he replied, that he would not for the world be Confessor to a King, because it would prevent him from the conscientious discharge of his duty. In former times, in truth, the traffic in indulgences was

carried to great lengths ; and this it was that broke up the system and gave a handle to the Protestants. The excellence of the scheme produced the power, and then the power led to the abuse of it. Infidel Popes went the farthest in extending the privileges of the Church ; and being held back by no scruples of faith or conscience, nearly ruined it. When some pious ecclesiastic was insisting to Leo X. on the necessity of reforming certain scandalous abuses, he pointed to a crucifix and said, 'Behold the fate of a reformer ! The system, as it is, is good enough for us !' They have taken the morality of the Gospel and engrafted upon it a system of superstition and priestcraft ; but still perhaps the former prevails over the latter. Even that duty of humanity to animals is beautifully provided for ; for on St. Antony's day, the patron of animals, the horses, etc., pass under a certain arch, and the priest sprinkles the Holy Water over them, so that they are virtually taken under the protection of the Church. We think we have a right to treat them anyhow, because they have no souls.

“The Roman Catholic is not a barbarous religion ; and it is also much milder than it was. This is a necessary consequence of the state of things. When three Englishmen were presented to Benedict XIV. (Lambertini), who was a man of wit and letters, he observed to them smiling, 'I know that you must look upon our religion as false and spurious, but I suppose you will have no objection to receive the blessing of an old man !' When Fuseli and I were there, an English-

man of the name of Brown had taken the pains to convert a Roman artist: the Englishman was sent from Rome, and the student was taken to the Inquisition, where he was shown the hooks in the wall and the instruments of torture used in former times, reprimanded, and soon after dismissed."

I asked Northcote whereabouts the Inquisition was? He said, "In a street behind the Vatican." He and Mr. Prince Hoare once took shelter in the portico out of a violent shower of rain, and considered it a great piece of inhumanity to be turned out into the street. He then noticed a curious mistake in Mrs. Radcliffe's *Italian*, where some one is brought from Naples to the Inquisition, and made to enter Rome through the Porta di Popolo, and then the other streets on the English side of Rome are described with great formality, which is as if any one was described as coming by the coach from Exeter, and after entering at Whitechapel, proceeding through Cheapside and the Strand to Charing Cross.

Northcote related a story told him by Nollekens of a singular instance of the effects of passion that he saw in the Trastevere, the oldest and most disorderly part of Rome.¹ Two women were quarrelling, when having used the most opprobrious language, one of them drew a knife from her bosom, and tried to plunge it into her rival's breast, but missing her blow and the other retiring to a

¹ These people are said to be the real descendants of the ancient Romans. [HAZLITT.]

short distance and laughing at her, in a fit of impotent rage she struck it into her own bosom. Her passion had been worked up to an uncontrollable pitch, and being disappointed of its first object, must find vent somewhere. I remarked it was what we did every day of our lives in a less degree, according to the vulgar proverb of *cutting off one's nose to spite one's face!*

Northcote then returned to the subject of the sale of his pictures. He said it was a satisfaction, though a melancholy one, to think that one's works might fetch more after one's death than during one's lifetime. He had once shown Farington¹ a landscape of Wilson's, for which a gentleman had given three hundred guineas at the first word; and Farington said he remembered Wilson's painting it, and how delighted he was when he got thirty pounds for it. Barrett rode in his coach, while Wilson nearly starved and was obliged to borrow ten pounds to go and die in Wales: yet he used to say that his pictures would be admired, when the name of Barrett was forgotten.²

Northcote said he also thought it a great hardship upon authors, that copyright should be restricted to a few years, instead of being continued for the benefit of the family, as in the case of *Hudibras*, *Paradise Lost*, and other works, by which booksellers made fortunes every year, though the descendants of the

¹ Joseph Farington, R.A., the landscape-painter. Farington, who had died in 1821, had been a pupil of Wilson's. [ED.]

² Hazlitt had already forgotten how to spell the name of George Barret, R.A. [ED.]

authors were still living in obscurity and distress. I said that in France a successful drama brought something to the author or his heirs every time it was acted. Northcote seemed to approve of this, and remarked that he always thought it very hard upon Richardson, just at the time he had brought out his *Pamela* or *Clarissa*, to have it pirated by an Irish bookseller through a treacherous servant whom he kept in his shop, and thus to lose all the profits of his immortal labours.¹

¹ It must be remembered that copyright did not extend to Ireland before the Union. Will the Irish under Home Rule claim the right of piracy? It is a question for Mr. Besant. [ED.]

CONVERSATION THE NINTH

NORTHCOTE remarked to-day that artists were more particular than authors as to character—the latter did not seem to care whom they associated with. He, Northcote, was disposed to attribute this to greater refinement of moral perception in his own profession. I said I thought it was owing to authors being more upon the town than painters, who were dependent upon particular individuals and in a manner accountable to them for the persons they might be seen in company with or might occasionally bring into contact with them. For instance, I said I thought H[aydon] was wrong in asking me to his *Private Day*, where I might meet with Lord M——, who was so loyal a man that he affected not to know that such a person as Admiral Blake had ever existed. On the same principle this Noble Critic was blind to the merit of Milton, in whom he could see nothing, though Mr. Pitt had been at the pains to repeat several fine passages to him.

Northcote said, “It’s extraordinary how particular the world sometimes are, and what prejudices they

take up against people, even where there is no objection to character, merely on the score of opinion. There is G[odwin], who is a very good man; yet when Mr. H—— and myself wished to introduce him at the house of a lady who lives in a round of society, and has a strong tinge of the *blue-stocking*, she would not hear of it. The sound of the name seemed to terrify her. It was his *writings* she was afraid of. Even Cosway made a difficulty too.”

I replied, “I should not have expected this of him, who was as great a visionary and as violent a politician as anybody could be.”

NORTHCOTE.—“It passed off in Cosway as whim. He was one of those butterfly characters that nobody minded: so that his opinion went for nothing: but it would not do to bring any one else there, whose opinion might be more regarded and equally unpalatable. G[odwin]’s case is particularly hard in this respect: he is a profligate in theory, and a bigot in conduct. He does not seem at all to practise what he preaches, though this does not appear to avail him anything.”

“Yes,” I said, “he writes against himself. He has written against matrimony, and has been twice married. He has scouted all the commonplace duties, and yet is a good husband and a kind father. He is a strange composition of contrary qualities. He is a cold formalist, and full of ardour and enthusiasm of mind; dealing in magnificent

projects and petty cavils ; naturally dull, and brilliant by dint of study ; pedantic and playful ; a dry logician and a writer of romances."

"You describe him," said Northcote, "as I remember Baretti once did Sir Joshua Reynolds at his own table, saying to him, 'You are extravagant and mean, generous and selfish, envious and candid, proud and humble, a genius and a mere ordinary mortal at the same time.' I may not remember his exact words, but that was their effect. The fact was, Sir Joshua was a mixed character, like the rest of mankind in that respect ; but knew his own failings, and was on his guard to keep them back as much as possible, though the defects would break out sometimes." —"G[odwin], on the contrary," I said, "is aiming to let his out and to magnify them into virtues in a kind of hotbed of speculation. He is shocking on paper and tame in reality."

"How is that ?" said Northcote.

"Why, I think it is easy enough to be accounted for ; he is naturally a cold speculative character, and indulges in certain metaphysical extravagances as an agreeable exercise for the imagination, which alarm persons of a grosser temperament, but to which he attaches no practical consequences whatever. So it has been asked how some very immoral or irreligious writers, such as Helveticus and others, have been remarked to be men of good moral character ? and I think the answer is the same. Persons of a studious, phlegmatic disposition can with impunity give a

license to their thoughts, which they are under no temptation to reduce into practice. The sting is taken out of evil by their constitutional indifference, and they look on virtue and vice as little more than words without meaning or the black and white pieces of the chess-board, in combining which the same skill and ingenuity may be shown. More depraved and combustible temperaments are warned of the danger of any latitude of opinion by their very proneness to mischief, and are forced by a secret consciousness to impose the utmost restraint both upon themselves and others. The greatest prudes are not always supposed to be the greatest enemies to pleasure. Besides, authors are very much confined by habit to a life of study and speculation, sow their wild oats in their books, and unless where their passions are very strong indeed, take their swing in theory and conform in practice to the ordinary rules and examples of the world."

Northcote said, "Certainly people are tenacious of appearances in proportion to the depravity of manners, as we may see in the simplicity of country-places. To be sure, a rake like Hodge in *Love in a Village* gets amongst them now and then; but in general they do many gross things without the least notion of impropriety, as if vice were a thing they had no more to do with than children." He then mentioned an instance of some young country-people who had to sleep on the floor in the same room and they parted the men from the women by some sacks

of corn, which served for a line of demarcation and an inviolable partition between them. I told Northcote a story of a countrywoman who coming to an inn in the West of England wanted a bed ; and being told they had none to spare, still persisted till the landlady said in a joke, " I tell you, good woman, I have none, unless you can prevail with the ostler to give you half of his."—" Well," said she, " if he is a sober, prudent man, I should not mind ! "

Something was then said of the manners of people abroad, who sometimes managed to unite an absence of *mauvaise honte* with what could hardly be construed into an ignorance of vice. The Princess Borghese (Buonaparte's sister) who was no saint, sat to Canova for a model, and being asked, " If she did not feel a little uncomfortable," answered, " No, there was a fire in the room."

" Custom," said Northcote, " makes a wonderful difference in taking off the sharpness of the first inflammable impression. People for instance were mightily shocked when they first heard that the boys at the Academy drew from a living model. But the effect almost immediately wears off with them. It is exactly like copying from a statue. The stillness, the artificial light, the attention to what they are about, the publicity even, draws off any idle thoughts, and they regard the figure and point out its defects or beauties, precisely as if it were of clay or marble." I said I had perceived this effect myself, that the anxiety to copy the object before one deadened every

other feeling ; but as this drew to a close, the figure seemed almost like something coming to life again, and that this was a very critical minute. He said, he found the students sometimes watched the women out, though they were not of a very attractive appearance, as none but those who were past their prime would sit in this way ; they looked upon it as an additional disgrace to what their profession imposed upon them, and as something unnatural. One in particular (he remembered) always came in a mask. Several of the young men in his time had however been lured into a course of dissipation and ruined by such connections ; one in particular, a young fellow of great promise but affected, and who thought that profligacy was a part of genius. I said, It was the easiest part. This was an advantage foreign art had over ours. A battered courtesan sat for Sir Joshua's Iphigene ; innocent girls sat for Canova's Graces, as I had been informed.

Northcote asked, if I had sent my son to school ? I said, I thought of the Charter House, if I could compass it. I liked those old-established places where learning grew for hundreds of years, better than any new-fangled experiments or modern seminaries. He inquired if I had ever thought of putting him to school on the Continent ; to which I answered, No, for I wished him to have an idea of home, before I took him abroad ; by beginning in the contrary method, I thought I deprived him both of the habitual attachment to the one and of the romantic pleasure

in the other. Northcote observed there were very fine schools at Rome in his time, one was an Italian, and another a Spanish College, at the last of which they acted plays of Voltaire's, such as *Zara*, *Mahomet*, etc., at some of which he had been present. The hall that served for the theatre was beautifully decorated; and just as the curtain was about to draw up, a hatchway was opened and showered down playbills on their heads with the names of the actors; such a part being by a Spanish Grandee of the first class, another by a Spanish Grandee of the second class, and they were covered with jewels of the highest value. Several Cardinals were also present (who did not attend the public theatres) and it was easy to gain admittance from the attention always shown to strangers.

Northcote then spoke of the courtesy and decorum of the Roman clergy in terms of warm praise, and said he thought it in a great measure owing to the conclave being composed of dignitaries of all nations, Spanish, German, Italian, which merged individual asperities and national prejudices in a spirit of general philanthropy and mutual forbearance. I said I had never met with a look from a Catholic priest (from the highest to the lowest) that seemed to reproach me with being a *tramontane*. This absence of all impertinence was to me the first of virtues. He repeated, "I have no fault to find with Italy. There may be vice in Rome, as in all great capitals (though I did not see it)—but in Parma and

the remoter towns, they seem all like one great and exemplary family." Their kindness to strangers was remarkable. He said he had himself travelled all the way from Lyons to Genoa, and from Genoa to Rome without speaking a word of the language and in the power of a single person without meeting with the smallest indignity; and everywhere, both at the inns and on the road, every attention was paid to his feelings and pains taken to alleviate the uncomfortableness of his situation. Set a Frenchman down in England to go from London to York in the same circumstances, and see what treatment he will be exposed to.

He recollected a person of the name of Gogain who had been educated in France and could not speak English—on landing, he held out half-a-guinea to pay the boatman who had rowed him only about twenty yards from the vessel, which the fellow put in his pocket and left him without a single farthing. Abroad, he would have been had before the magistrate for such a thing, and probably sent to the galleys. There is a qualifying property in nature that makes most things equal. In England they cannot drag you out of your bed to a scaffold, or take an estate from you without some reason assigned: but as the law prevents any flagrant acts of injustice, so it makes it more difficult to obtain redress.

"We pay," continued Northcote, "for every advantage we possess by the loss of some other. Poor

Goblet,¹ the other day, after making himself a drudge to Nollekens all his life, with difficulty recovered eight hundred pounds compensation; and though he was clearly entitled, by the will, to the models which the sculptor left behind him, he was afraid to risk the law expenses, and gave it up." Some person had been remarking, that every one had a right to leave his property to whom he pleased. "Not," said Northcote, "when he has promised it to another." I asked if Mr. —— was not the same person I had once seen come into his painting-room, in a rusty black coat and brown worsted stockings, very much with the air of a man who carries a pistol in an inside pocket? He said, "It might be: he was a dull man, but a great scholar—one of those described in the epigram—

" 'Oh! ho, quoth Time to Thomas Hearne,
Whatever I forget, you learn.'"

We then alluded to an attack of Cobbett's on some spruce legacy-hunter, quoted in the last Sunday's *Examiner*; and Northcote spoke in raptures of the power in Cobbett's writings, and asked me if I had ever seen him. I said, I had for a short time; that he called *rogue* and *scoundrel* at every second word in the coolest way imaginable, and went on just the same in a room as on paper.

I returned to what Northcote lately said of his

¹ Alexander Goblet, the head-workman in Nollekens's studio.
[Ed.]

travels in Italy, and asked if there were fine Titians at Genoa or Naples. "Oh, yes!" he said, "heaps at the latter place. Titian had painted them for one of the Farnese family; and when the second son succeeded the eldest as King of Spain, the youngest, who was Prince of Parma, went to Naples, and took them with him. There is that fine one (which you have heard me speak of) of Paul III. and his two natural sons or nephews, as they were called. My God! what a look it has! The old man is sitting in his chair, and looking up to one of the sons, with his hands grasping the arm-chair, and his long spider fingers, and seems to say (as plain as words can speak), 'You wretch! what do you want now?'—while the young fellow is advancing with a humble hypocritical air. It is true history, as Fuseli said, and indeed it turned out so; for the son (or nephew) was afterwards thrown out of the palace-windows by the mob, and torn to pieces by them." In speaking of the different degrees of information abroad, he remarked, "One of the persons where I lodged at Rome did not even know the family name of the reigning Pope, and only spoke of him as the *Papa*; another person, who was also my landlady, knew all their history, and could tell me the names of the Cardinals from my describing their coats of arms to her."

Northcote related an anecdote of Mr. Moore (brother of the General), who was on board an English frigate in the American war, and coming in

sight of another vessel which did not answer their signals, they expected an action, when the Captain called his men together, and addressed them in the following manner: "You dirty, ill-looking blackguards! do you suppose I can agree to deliver up such a set of scarecrows as you as prisoners to that smart, frippery Frenchman? I can't think of such a thing. No! by God, you must fight till not a man of you is left, for I should be ashamed of owning such a ragamuffin crew!" This was received with loud shouts and assurances of victory, but the vessel turned out to be an English one.

I asked if he had seen the American novels, in one of which (*The Pilot*) there was an excellent description of an American privateer expecting the approach of an English man-of-war in a thick fog, when some one saw what appeared to be a bright cloud rising over the fog, but it proved to be the top-sail of a seventy-four. Northcote thought this was striking, but had not seen the book. "Was it one of I[rving]'s?" Oh! no, he is a mere trifler¹—a *filigree* man—an English *littérateur* at second hand; but *The Pilot*² gave a true and unvarnished picture of American character and manners. The storm, the fight, the whole account of the ship's crew, and in particular

¹ If this was really Hazlitt's view, it shows strange want of appreciation of Washington Irving, who had already published several of the most elegant and finished of his works, and had been before the public for twenty years. [ED.]

² James Fenimore Cooper's stirring romance, first published in 1823, and the fourth of his works of fiction. [ED.]

of an old boatswain, were done to the life—every thing

“Suffered a sea-change
Into something new and strange.”

On land he did not do so well. The fault of American literature (when not a mere vapid imitation of ours) was, that it ran too much into dry, minute, literal description; or if it made an effort to rise above this ground of matter-of-fact, it was forced and exaggerated, “horrors accumulating on horror’s head.” They had *no natural imagination*. This was likely to be the case in a new country like America, where there were no dim traces of the past—no venerable monuments—no romantic associations; where all (except the physical) remained to be created, and where fiction, if they attempted it, would take as preposterous and extravagant a shape as their local descriptions were jejune and servile. Cooper’s novels and Brown’s¹ romances (something on the model of Godwin’s) were the two extremes.

Some remark was made on the failure of a great bookseller, and on the supposition that now we should find out the author of the Scotch novels. “Ay,” said Northcote, “we shall find more than one.” I said, I thought not; to say nothing of the beauties, the peculiarities of style and grammar in every page proved them to be by the same hand. Nobody else could write so well—or so ill, in point of mere

¹ Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810), the author of *Wieland*, *Arthur Mervyn*, and *Clara Howard*. [ED.]

negligence. Northcote said, "It was a pity he should fling away a fortune twice. There were some people who could not keep money when they had got it. It was a kind of incontinence of the purse. Zoffani did the same thing. He made a fortune in England by his pictures, which he soon got rid of, and another in India, which went the same way."

We somehow got from Sir Walter to the Queen's trial, and the scenes at Brandenburg House. I said they were a strong illustration of that instinct of servility—that *hankering* after rank and power, which appeared to me to be the base part of human nature. Here were all the patriots and Jacobins of London and Westminster, who scorned and hated the King, going to pay their homage to the Queen, and ready to worship the very rags of royalty. The wives and daughters of popular caricaturists and of forgotten demagogues were ready to pull caps in the presence-chamber for precedence, till they were parted by Mr. Alderman Wood. Every fool must go to kiss hands; "our maid's aunt of Brentford" must sip loyalty from the Queen's hand! That was the true court to which *they* were admitted: the instant there was the smallest opening, all must rush in, *tag-rag and bobtail*. All the fierceness of independence and all the bristling prejudices of popular jealousy were smoothed down in a moment by the velvet touch of the Queen's hand! No matter what else she was (whether her cause were right or wrong)—it was the mock-equality with sovereign rank, the acting in a farce of state, that

was the secret charm. That was what drove them mad.

The world must have something to admire ; and the more worthless and stupid their idol is, the better, provided it is fine : for it equally flatters their appetite for wonder, and hurts their self-love less. This is the reason why people formerly were so fond of idols : they fell down and worshipped them, and made others do the same, for theatrical effect ; while, all the while, they knew they were but wood and stone painted over. We in modern times have got from the *dead* to the *living* idol, and bow to hereditary imbecility. The less of genius and virtue, the greater our self-complacency. We do not care how high the elevation, so that it is wholly undeserved. True greatness excites our envy ; mere rank, our unqualified respect. That is the reason of our antipathy to new-made dynasties, and of our acquiescence in old-established despotism. We think *we* could sit upon a throne, if we had had the good luck to be born to one ; but we feel that we have neither talent nor courage to raise ourselves to one. If any one does, he seems to have got the start of us ; and we are glad to pull him back again.

I remember Mr. R——,¹ of Liverpool (a very excellent man and a good patriot) saying, many years ago, in reference to Buonaparte and George III., that “the superiority of rank was quite enough for him, without the intellectual superiority.” That is

¹ Probably William Roscoe. [ED.]

what has made so many renegadoes and furious Anti-Buonapartists among our poets and politicians, because he got before them in the race of power. Northcote: "And the same thing made *you* stick to him, because you thought he was your fellow! It is wonderful how much of our virtues, as well as of our vices, is referable to self. Did you ever read Rochefoucault?"—Yes. "And don't you think he is right?" In a great measure: but I like Mandeville better. He goes more into his subject. "Oh! he is a devil. There is a description of a clergyman's hand he has given, which I have always had in my eye whenever I have had to paint a fine gentleman's hand. I thought him too metaphysical, but it is long since I read him. His book was burnt by the common hangman; was it not?" Yes; but he did not at all like this circumstance, and is always recurring to it.—"No one can like this kind of condemnation, because every sensible man knows he is not a judge in his own cause; and besides, is conscious, if the verdict were on the other side, how ready he would be to catch at it as decisive in his favour."

I said, it was amusing to see the way in which he fell upon Steele, Shaftesbury, and other amiable writers, and the terror you were in for your favourites, just as when a hawk is hovering over and going to pounce upon some of the more harmless feathered tribe. He added, "It was surprising how Swift had escaped with so little censure; but the *Gulliver's Travels* passed off as a story-book,

and you might say in verse what you would be pelted for in plain prose.—The same thing you have observed in politics may be observed in religion too. You see the anxiety to divide and bring nearer to our own level. The Creator of the universe is too high an object for us to approach; the Catholics therefore have introduced the Virgin Mary and a host of saints, with whom their votaries feel more at their ease and on a par. The real object of worship is kept almost out of sight. Dignum the singer (who is a Catholic) was arguing on this subject with some one, who wanted to convert him, and he replied in his own defence—‘If you had a favour to ask of some great person, would you not first apply to a common friend to intercede for you?’”

In some part of the foregoing conversation, Northcote remarked that, “West used to say, you could always tell the highest nobility at court, from their profound humility to the King: the others kept at a distance, and did not seem to care about it. The more the former raised the highest person, the more they raised themselves who were next in point of rank. They had a greater interest in the question; and the King would have a greater jealousy of them than of others. When B[eechey]¹ was painting the Queen, with whom he used to be

¹ Sir William Beechey, R.A. (1753-1839). He painted Queen Charlotte's portrait in 1793, and was, in consequence, made her artist in ordinary, and knighted. He was the fashionable portrait-painter till Lawrence took his place. [Ed.]

quite familiar, he was one day surprised, when the Prince-Regent came into the room, to see the profound homage and dignified respect with which he approached her. 'Good God!' said he to himself, 'here is the second person in the kingdom comes into the room in this manner, while I have been using the greatest freedoms!' To be sure! that was the very reason: the second person in the kingdom wished to invest the first with all possible respect, so much of which was naturally reflected back upon himself. B[eechey] had nothing to lose or gain in this game of royal ceremony, and was accordingly treated as a cypher."

CONVERSATION THE TENTH

NORTHCOTE showed me a printed circular from the Academy, with blanks to be filled up by Academicians recommending young students to draw. One of these related to an assurance as to the moral character of the candidate; Northcote said, "What can I know about that? This zeal for morality begins with inviting me to tell a lie. I know whether he can draw or not, because he brings me specimens of his drawings; but what am I to know of the moral character of a person I have never seen before? Or what business have the Academy to inquire into it? I suppose they are not afraid he will steal the Farnese Hercules; and as to idleness and debauchery, he will not be cured of these by cutting him off from the pursuit of a study on which he has set his mind, and in which he has a fair chance to succeed.

"I told one of them, with as grave a face as I could, that, as to his moral character, he must go to his god-fathers and god-mothers for that. He answered very simply, that they were a great way off, and that he had nobody to appeal to but his apothecary! The Academy

is not an institution for the suppression of vice, but for the encouragement of the Fine Arts. Why then go out of their way to meddle with what was provided for by other means—the law and the pulpit? It would not have happened in Sir Joshua's time," continued Northcote, "nor even in Fuseli's: but the present men are 'dressed in a little brief authority,' and they wish to make the most of it, without perceiving the limits. No good can possibly come of this *busybody* spirit. The dragging morality into everything, in season and out of season, is only giving a handle to hypocrisy, and turning virtue into a by-word for impertinence!"

Here Northcote stopped suddenly, to ask if there was not such a word as *rivulet* in the language? I said it was as much a word in the language as it was a thing in itself. He replied, it was not to be found in Johnson; the word was *riveret* there. I thought this must be in some of the new editions; Dr. Johnson would have knocked anybody down, who had used the word *riveret*. It put me in mind of a story of Y[ates] the actor, who being asked how he was, made answer that he had been indisposed for some days with a *feveret*. The same person, speaking of the impossibility of escaping from too great publicity, related an anecdote of his being once in a remote part of the Highlands, and seeing an old gentleman fishing, he went up to inquire some particulars as to the mode of catching the salmon at what are called "salmon-leaps."—The old gentleman began his reply

—“ Why, Mr. Y[ates],” at which the actor started back in great surprise. “ Good God !” said Northcote, “ did he consider this as a matter of wonder, that, after showing himself on a stage for a number of years, people should know his face ? If an artist or an author were recognised in that manner, it might be a proof of celebrity, because it would show that they had been sought for ; but an actor is so much seen in public, that it is no wonder he is known by all the world.

“ I once went with Opie in the stage-coach to Exeter ; and when we parted ; he to go on to Cornwall and I to Plymouth, there was a young gentleman in the coach who asked me, ‘ Who it was that I had been conversing with ? ’ I said it was Mr. Opie, the painter ; at which he expressed the greatest surprise, and was exceedingly concerned to think he had not known it before. I did not tell him who I was, to see if my name would electrify him in the same manner. That brings to my mind the story I perhaps may have told you before, of a Mr. A[ston] and Dr. Pennick of the Museum. They got into some quarrel at the theatre ; and the former presenting his card, said with great pomposity, ‘ My name is A[ston], sir ; ’ to which the other answered, ‘ I hear it, sir, and am not terrified ! ’ ” I asked if this was the A[ston]¹ who fought the duel with F[itgerald]. He said he could not tell, but he was our ambassador to some of the petty German States.

A country gentleman came in, who complimented

¹ Aston Henry Aston, the duellist and diplomatist. [ED.]

Northcote on his pictures of animals and birds, which I knew he would not like. He muttered something when he was gone, in allusion to the proverb of *giving snuff to a cat*. Afterwards, a miniature-painter brought some copies he had made of a portrait of a young lady by Northcote. They were really very well, and we learned he was to have five guineas for the larger size, and two for the smaller ones. I could now account for the humility and shabby appearance of the artist. He paid his court better than his rustic predecessor; for being asked by Northcote if the portrait of the young lady was approved? he said the mother had told him, before she engaged him to copy it, that "it was one of the *loveliest* pictures (that was her expression) that had ever been seen!" This praise was better relished than that of his dogs and parrots.

I took notice to Northcote that the man had a very good head; but that he put me in mind of the state and pretensions of the art before artists wrote *Esquire* after their names. He said, Yes, he was like Andrew Taffi, or some of those in Vasari. I observed how little he was paid for what he really did so well; to which Northcote merely replied, "In all things that are not necessary, those in the second class must always be miserably paid. Copying pictures is like plain-work among women, it is what anybody can do, and, therefore, nothing but a bare living is to be got by it." He added, that the young lady, whose portrait her family was so anxious to have copied, was

dead, and this was a kind of diversion to their grief. It was a very natural mode of softening it down; it was still recurring to the object of their regret, and yet dwelling on it in an agreeable point of view. "The wife of General H——," he continued, "many years ago, came to me to do a picture of her son, a lieutenant in the navy, who was killed in battle, but whom I had never seen. There was no picture of him to go by, but she insisted on my doing one under her direction. I attempted a profile as the easiest; and she sat behind me and sang in a soft manner to herself, and told me what I was to do. It was a wretched business, as you may suppose, being made out from description; but she would have it to be a great likeness, and brought all the family and even the servants to see it, who probably did not dare to be of a different opinion. I said to her, 'What a pity it was Sir Joshua had not done a portrait of him in his lifetime!' At this she expressed great contempt, and declared she would not give twopence for all Sir Joshua's pictures; indeed, she had one which I was very welcome to have if I chose to come for it. I lost no time in going to her house, and when I came there, she led me up into an old garret which was used as a lumber-room, and taking it carefully out of a shabby frame not worth a groat, said, 'There, take it, I am not sorry to get it out of the house.' I asked what it was that made her so indifferent about this picture? and she answered, 'It was a likeness of a young gentleman who had been kind enough to die,

by which means the estate came to the General.' She spoke in this unfeeling manner, though her own son had just died in the same circumstances ; and she had had a monument made for him, and strewed flowers upon it, and made such a *fuss* about his death, that she would hardly have known what to do if he had come to life again !” I asked what was her reason for disliking Reynolds's pictures ? “Oh ! that was her ignorance, she did not know why !”

Northcote said, “G[odwin] called here with his daughter. I asked her about Lord Byron ; she said his temper was so bad that nobody could live with him. The only way to pass the day tolerably well with him was to contradict him the first thing in the morning. I have known tempers of that kind myself ; you must quarrel with them in order to be friends. If you did not conquer them, they would conquer you.” Something was observed about Byron and Tom Paine, as to their attacks upon religion ; and I said that sceptics and philosophical unbelievers appeared to me to have just as little liberality or enlargement of view as the most bigoted fanatic. They could not bear to make the least concession to the opposite side. They denied the argument that because the Scriptures were fine they were therefore of divine origin, and yet they virtually admitted it ; for, not believing their truth, they thought themselves bound to maintain that they were good for nothing. I had once, I said, given great offence to a knot of persons of this description, by contending that Jacob's

Dream was finer than anything in Shakspeare ; and that Hamlet would bear no comparison with, at least, one character in the New Testament. A young poet had said on this occasion, he did not like the Bible, because there was nothing about flowers in it ; and I asked him if he had forgot that passage, "Behold the lilies of the field," etc. ?

"Yes," said Northcote, "and in the Psalms and in the book of Job, there are passages of unrivalled beauty. In the latter there is the description of the war-horse, that has been so often referred to, and of the days of Job's prosperity ; and in the Psalms, I think there is that passage, 'He openeth his hands, and the earth is filled with plenteousness ; he turneth away his face, and we are troubled ; he hideth himself, and we are left in darkness ;' or, again, how fine is that expression, 'All the beasts of the forests are mine, and so are the cattle upon a thousand hills !' What an expanse, and what a grasp of the subject ! Everything is done upon so large a scale, and yet with such ease, as if seen from the highest point of view. It has mightily a look of inspiration or of being dictated by a superior intelligence. They say mere English readers cannot understand Homer, because it is a translation ; but why will it not bear a translation as well as the book of Job, if it is as fine ? In Shakspeare, undoubtedly, there is a prodigious variety and force of human character and passion, but he does not take us out of ourselves ; he has a wonderful, almost a miraculous

fellow-feeling with human nature in every possible way, but that is all. Macbeth is full of sublimity, but the sublimity is that of the earth, it does not reach to heaven. It is a still stronger objection that is made to Hogarth ; he, too, gave the incidents and characters of human life with infinite truth and ability ; but then it was in the lowest forms of all, and he could not rise even to common dignity or beauty. There is a faculty that enlarges and beautifies objects, even beyond nature. It is for this reason that we must, reluctantly perhaps, give the preference to Milton over Shakspeare ; for his Paradise (to go no further) is certainly a scene of greater beauty and happiness than was ever found on earth, though so vividly described that we easily make the transition, and transport ourselves there. It is the same difference that there is between Raphael and Michael Angelo, though Raphael, too, in many of his works merited the epithet of *divine*."

I mentioned some lines from Shakspeare I had seen quoted in a translation of a French work, and applied to those who adhered to Buonaparte in his misfortunes :

“ ——He that can endure
To follow with allegiance a fallen lord,
Does conquer him that did his master conquer,
And earns a place i' the story.”

I said I was struck to see how finely they came in. “ Oh !” replied Northcote, “ if they were Shakspeare’s, they were sure to be fine. What a power there

always is in any *bit* brought in from him or Milton among other things! How it shines like a jewel! I think Milton reads best in this way; he is too fine for a continuance. Don't you think Shakspeare and the writers of that day had a prodigious advantage in using phrases and combinations of style, which could not be admitted now that the language is reduced to a more precise and uniform standard, but which yet have a peculiar force and felicity when they can be justified by the privilege of age?" He said, he had been struck with this idea lately, in reading an old translation of Boccaccio (about the time of Queen Elizabeth) in which the language, though quaint, had often a beauty that could not well be conveyed in any modern translation.

He spoke of Lord Byron's notions about Shakspeare. I said I did not care much about his opinions. Northcote replied, they were evidently capricious, and taken up in the spirit of contradiction. I said, not only so (as far as I can judge), but without any better founded ones in his own mind. They appear to me conclusions without premises or any previous process of thought or inquiry. I like old opinions with new reasons, not new opinions without any—not mere *ipse dixits*. He was too arrogant to assign a reason to others or to need one for himself. It was quite enough that he subscribed to any assertion, to make it clear to the world, as well as binding on his valet!

Northcote said, there were people who could not argue. Fuseli was one of these. He could throw

out very brilliant and striking things ; but if you at all questioned him, he could no more give an answer than a child of three years old. He had no resources, nor any *corps de reserve* of argument beyond his first line of battle. That was imposing and glittering enough. Neither was Lord Byron a philosopher, with all his sententiousness and force of expression. Probably one ought not to expect the two things together ; for to produce a startling and immediate effect, one must keep pretty much upon the surface ; and the search after truth is a very slow and obscure process.

CONVERSATION THE ELEVENTH

As soon as I went in to-day, Northcote asked me if that was *my* character of Shakspeare, which had been quoted in a newspaper the day before? It was so like what he had thought a thousand times that he could almost swear he had written it himself. I said no; it was from Kendall's *Letters on Ireland*; though I believed I had expressed nearly the same idea in print. I had seen the passage myself, and hardly knew at first whether to be pleased or vexed at it. It was provoking to have one's words taken out of one's mouth as it were by another; and yet it seemed also an encouragement to reflect, that if one only threw one's bread upon the waters, one was sure to find it again after many days. The world, if they do not listen to an observation the first time, will listen to it at second hand from those who have a more agreeable method of insinuating it, or who do not tell them too many truths at once.

Northcote said, he thought the account undoubtedly just, to whomever it belonged.¹ The greatest genius

¹ "Shakspeare's verses are not exactly 'wood-notes wild.' He was indebted to a most extensive reading at the same time as

(such as that of Shakspeare) implied the greatest power, and this implied the greatest ease and unconsciousness of effort, or of anything extraordinary effected. As this writer stated, "He would as soon think of being vain of putting one foot before another, as of writing *Macbeth* or *Hamlet*." Or as Hudibras has expressed it, poetry was to him

"—a thing no more difficile
Than to a blackbird 'tis to whistle."

"This (said he) is what I have always said of Correggio's style, that he could not help it: it was his nature. Besides, use familiarises us to everything. How could Shakspeare be expected to be astonished at what he did every day? No; he was thinking to a most transcendent genius. He did not pique himself upon originality, but sat down to write his plays for the simple purpose of the moment, and without a glimpse or an ambition of the immortality which they were to acquire. He made use of whatever he recollected and thought desirable, with the contrivance of an ordinary play-writer, and only grew original and vast and exquisite, in spite of himself. If it be true that 'he wrote not for an age, but for all time,' still there was no one who knew less of that fact than he! He imagined himself writing only for the day before him; and it is to this very circumstance that we owe the ease, the flashes, and the soarings of his spirit. He was never overpowered by the intended loftiness of the occasion. He made no efforts that were laborious, because his mind was always superior to his object, and never bowed down to it. He possessed, too, that affluence of genius, which rendered him not only prodigal in its use, but almost unacquainted with its existence. He never stood upon its dignity; he was never fearful of its loss nor of its denial. The swan of Avon, like the swans from which poets derive their title,

either merely of the subject before him, or of gaining his bread. It is only upstarts or pretenders, who do not know what to make of their good fortune or undeserved reputation. It comes to the same thing that I have heard my brother remark with respect to my father and old Mr. Tolcher, whose picture you see there. He had a great friendship for my father and a great opinion of his integrity; and whenever he came to see him, always began with saying, 'Well, honest Mr. Samuel Northcote, how do you?' This he repeated so often, and they were so used to it, that my brother said they became like words of course, and conveyed no more impression of anything peculiar than if he had merely said, 'Well, good Mr. Northcote, *et cetera*,' or used any common expression.

was all strength and grace and beauty, without a consciousness of either. And this character of his genius accords with that character of facility, of gentleness, and of unostentation, which his biographer ascribes to the man. He knew of nothing within himself, of which he felt it worth while to be vain. He would as soon have been vain of his power to put one foot before another, as of his power to write the *Tempest* or *Macbeth*. It belongs, in the midst of abundance, to GENIUS as BEAUTY, to be thoughtless of itself. It is only for the dull and the ugly—or at least for those in whom the claims to beauty or to genius are equivocal—to be for ever contemplating either in themselves, or for ever demanding the acknowledgments of others. With the plenary possessors, the luxury is too common, too much of everyday wear, to fix their attention. The restlessness of the remainder is the restlessness of poverty, and contrasts itself with the carelessness of riches."—Kendall's *Letters on Ireland*. [HAZLITT.] *Letters to a Friend on the State of Ireland* had then (1826) just been published by Edward Augustus Kendall, the editor of *The Literary Chronicle*. [ED.]

So Shakspeare was accustomed to write his fine speeches till he ceased to wonder at them himself, and would have been surprised to find that you did."

The conversation now turned on an answer in a newspaper to Canning's assertion, that "Slavery was not inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity, inasmuch as it was the beauty of Christianity to accommodate itself to all conditions and circumstances." Did Canning mean to say, because Christianity accommodated itself to, or made the best of all situations, it did not therefore give the preference to any? Because it recommended mildness and fortitude under sufferings, did it not therefore condemn the infliction of them? Or did it not forbid injustice and cruelty in the strongest terms? This were indeed a daring calumny on its founder: it were an insolent irony. Don Quixote would not have said so. It was like the Italian banditti, who when they have cut off the ears of their victims, make them go down on their knees, and return thanks to an image of the Virgin Mary for the favour they have done them. It was because such things do exist, that Christ came to set His face against them, and to establish the maxim, "Do unto others as you would that they should do unto you."

If Mr. Canning will say that the masters would like to be treated as they treat their slaves, then he may say that slavery is consistent with the spirit of Christianity. No; the meaning of those

maxims of forbearance and submission, which the Quakers have taken too literally, is, that you are not to drive out one devil by another; it aims at discouraging a resort to violence and anger, for if the temper it inculcates could become universal, there would be no injuries to resent. It objects against the power of the sword, but it is to substitute a power ten thousand times stronger than the sword—that which subdues and conquers the affections, and strikes at the very root and thought of evil. All that is meant by such sayings, as that if a person “smites us on one cheek, we are to turn to him the other,” is, that we are to keep as clear as possible of a disposition to retaliate and exasperate injuries; or there is a Spanish proverb which explains this, that says, *“It is he who gives the second blow that begins the quarrel.”*

On my referring to what had been sometimes asserted of the inefficacy of pictures in Protestant churches, Northcote said he might be allowed to observe in favour of his own art, that though they might not strike at first from a difference in our own belief, yet they would gain upon the spectator by the force of habit. The practice of image-worship was probably an afterthought of the Papists themselves, from seeing the effects produced on the minds of the rude and ignorant by visible representations of saints and martyrs. The rulers of the Church at first only thought to amuse and attract the people by pictures and statues (as they did by music and rich dresses,

from which no inference was to be drawn); but when these representations of sacred subjects were once placed before the senses of an uninstructed but imaginative people, they looked at them with wonder and eagerness, till they began to think they saw them move; and then miracles were worked; and as this became a source of wealth and great resort to the several shrines and churches, every means was used to encourage the superstition and a belief in the supernatural virtues of the objects by the clergy and government. So he thought that if pictures were set up in our churches, they would by degrees inspire the mind with all the feelings of awe or interest that were necessary or proper. It was less difficult to excite enthusiasm than to keep it under due restraint. So in Italy, the higher powers did not much relish those processions of naked figures, taken from scriptural stories (such as Adam and Eve) on particular holidays, for they led to scandal and abuse; but they fell in with the humour of the rabble, and were lucrative to the lower orders of priests and friars, and the Pope could not expressly discountenance them. He said we were in little danger (either from our religion or temperament) of running into those disgraceful and fanciful extremes; but should rather do everything in our power to avoid the opposite error of a dry and repulsive asceticism. We *could not* give too much encouragement to the fine arts.

Our talk of to-day concluded by his saying, that he often blamed himself for uttering what might be

thought harsh things ; and that on mentioning this once to Kemble, and saying it sometimes kept him from sleep after he had been out in company, Kemble had replied, “ Oh ! you need not trouble yourself so much about them : others never think of them afterwards ! ”

CONVERSATION THE TWELFTH

NORTHCOTE was painting from a little girl when I went in. B——¹ was there. Something was said of a portrait of Dunning by Sir Joshua (an unfinished head), and B—— observed, “Ah! my good friend, if you and I had known at that time what those things would fetch, we might have made our fortunes now. By laying out a few pounds on the loose sketches and sweepings of the lumber-room, we might have made as many hundreds.”—“Yes,” said Northcote, “it was thought they would soon be forgot, and they went for nothing on that account: but they are more sought after than ever, because those imperfect hints and studies seem to bring one more in contact with the artist, and explain the process of his mind in the several stages. A finished work is, in a manner, detached from and independent of its author, like a child that can go alone: in the other case, it seems

¹ Probably Beechey again; and the conjecture may be hazarded that, in spite of the attempt to conceal the fact, X—— is still Beechey throughout this Conversation. Northcote was very jealous of the fashionable Court painter. [ED.]

to be still in progress, and to await his hand to finish it; or we supply the absence of well-known excellences out of our own imagination, so that we have a twofold property in it."

Northcote read something out of a newspaper about the Suffolk Street Exhibition, in which his own name was mentioned, and M[artin]'s,¹ the landscape-painter. B—— said, his pictures were a trick—a streak of red, and then a streak of blue. But, said Northcote, there is some merit in finding out a new trick. I ventured to hint, that the receipt for his was, clouds upon mountains, and mountains upon clouds—that there was number and quantity, but neither form nor colour. He appeared to me an instance of a total want of imagination; he mistook the character of the feelings associated with everything, and I mentioned as an instance his Adam and Eve, which had been much admired, but which was a panoramic view of the map of Asia, instead of a representation of our first parents in Paradise.

After B—— was gone, we spoke of X——. I regretted his want of delicacy towards the public as well as towards his private friends. I did not think he had failed so much from want of capacity, as from attempting to bully the public into a premature or overstrained admiration of him, instead of gaining ground

¹ John Martin (1789-1854). His "Adam's First Sight of Eve," to which Hazlitt refers, was hung in the Royal Academy for 1813. Martin quarrelled with the Academy, and exhibited mainly at Suffolk Street between 1824 and 1838. [ED.]

upon them by improving on himself; and he now felt the ill effects of the reaction of this injudicious proceeding. He had no real love of his art, and therefore did not apply or give his whole mind sedulously to it; and was more bent on bespeaking notoriety beforehand by puffs and announcements of his works, than on giving them that degree of perfection which would ensure lasting reputation. No one would ever attain the highest excellence, who had so little nervous sensibility as to take credit for it (either with himself or others) without being at the trouble of producing it. It was securing the reward in the first instance; and afterwards, it would be too much to expect the necessary exertion or sacrifices. Unlimited credit was as dangerous to success in art as in business. "And yet he still finds dupes," said Northcote; to which I replied, it was impossible to resist him, as long as you kept on terms with him: any difference of opinion or reluctance on your part made no impression on him, and unless you quarrelled with him downright, you must do as he wished you. — "And how then," said Northcote, "do you think it possible for a person of this hard unyielding disposition to be a painter, where everything depends on seizing the nicest inflections of feeling and the most evanescent shades of beauty?"

"No, I'll tell you why he cannot be a painter. He has not virtue enough. No one can give out to others what he has not in himself, and there is nothing in his mind to delight or captivate the world. I will not

deny the mechanical dexterity, but he fails in the mental part. There was Sir Peter Lely: he is full of defects; but he was the fine gentleman of his age, and you see this character stamped on every one of his works;—even his errors prove it; and this is one of those things that the world receive with gratitude. Sir Joshua again was not without his faults: he had not grandeur, but he was a man of a mild, bland, amiable character; and this predominant feeling appears so strongly in his works, that you cannot mistake it; and this is what makes them so delightful to look at, and constitutes their charm to others, even without their being conscious of it. There was such a look of nature too. I remember once going through a suite of rooms where they were showing me several fine Vandykes; and we came to one where there were some children, by Sir Joshua, seen through a door—it was like looking at the reality, they were so full of life—the branches of the trees waved over their heads, and the fresh air seemed to play on their cheeks—I soon forgot Vandyke!

“So, in the famous St. Jerome of Correggio, Garrick used to say, that the Saint resembled a Satyr, and that the child was like a monkey; but then there is such a look of life in the last, it dazzles you with spirit and vivacity; you can hardly believe but it will move or fly;—indeed, Sir Joshua took his Puck from it, only a little varied in the attitude.” I said I had seen it not long ago, and that it had remarkably the look of a spirit or a faery or preternatural being,

though neither beautiful nor dignified. I remarked to Northcote, that I had never sufficiently relished Correggio; that I had tried several times to work myself up to the proper degree of admiration, but that I always fell back again into my former state of lukewarmness and scepticism; though I could not help allowing, that what he did, he appeared to me to do with more feeling than anybody else; that I could conceive Raphael or even Titian to have represented objects from mere natural capacity (as we see them in a looking-glass) without being absolutely wound up in them, but that I could fancy Correggio's pencil to thrill with sensibility: he brooded over the idea of grace or beauty in his mind till the sense grew faint with it; and like a lover or a devotee, he carried his enthusiasm to the brink of extravagance and affectation, so enamoured was he of his art! Northcote assented to this as a just criticism, and said, "That is why his works must live: but X—— is a hardened egotist, devoted to nothing but himself!" Northcote then asked about ——,¹ and if she was handsome? I said she might sit for the portrait of Rebecca in *Ivanhoe*!

He then turned the conversation to *Brambletye House*.² He thought the writer had failed in Charles II. and Rochester. Indeed, it was a daring attempt to make *bons mots* for two such characters. The wit

¹ Sir William Beechey's second wife, no doubt; a very charming and accomplished person. [ED.]

² Horace Smith's historical romance. [ED.]

must be sharp and fine indeed, that would do to put into their mouths : even Sir Walter might tremble to undertake it ! He had made Milton speak too : this was almost as dangerous an attempt as for Milton to put words into the mouth of the Deity. The great difficulty was to know where to stop, and not to trespass on forbidden ground. Cervantes was one of the boldest and most original inventors ; yet he had never ventured beyond his depth. He had in the person of his hero really represented the maxims of benevolence and generosity inculcated by the Christian religion : that was a law to him ; and by his fine conception of the subject, he had miraculously succeeded. Shakspeare alone could be said in his grotesque creations to be above all law. Richardson had succeeded admirably in *Clarissa*, because he had a certain rule to go by or certain things to avoid, for a perfect woman was a negative character ; but he had failed in *Sir Charles Grandison*, and made him a lump of odious affectation, because a perfect man is not a negative, but a positive character ; and in aiming at faultlessness, he had produced only the most vapid effeminacy. After all, *Brambletye House* was about as good as the *Rejected Addresses*. There was very little difference between a parody and an imitation. The defects and peculiarities are equally seized upon in either case.

He did not know how Sir Walter would take it. To have imitators seemed at first a compliment, yet no one liked it. You could not put Fuseli in a

greater passion than by calling Maria Cosway¹ an imitator of his. Nothing made Sir Joshua so mad, as Miss Reynolds's portraits, which were an exact imitation of all his defects. Indeed, she was obliged to keep them out of his way. He said, "They made everybody else laugh, and himself cry." It is that which makes every one dread a mimic. Your self-love is alarmed, without being so easily reassured. You know there is a difference, but it is not great enough to make you feel quite at ease. The line of demarcation between the true and the spurious is not sufficiently broad and palpable. The copy you see is vile or indifferent; and the original, you suspect (but for your partiality to yourself), is not perhaps much better.

This is what I have often felt in looking at the drawings of the students at the Academy, or when young artists have brought their first crude attempts for my opinion. The glaring defects, the abortive efforts have almost disgusted me with the profession. Good God! I have said, is this what the art is made up of? How do I know that my own productions may not appear in the same light to others? Whereas the seeing the finest specimens of art, instead of disheartening, gives me courage to proceed: one cannot be wrong in treading in the same footsteps,

¹ This extraordinary being was the wife of Richard Cosway, R.A. She ran away from her husband, became the lady superior of a French nunnery, and disappeared about 1822. She had considerable talent both as an artist and as a musician. [Ed.]

and to fall short of them is no disgrace, while the faintest reflection of their excellence is glorious. It was this that made Correggio cry out on seeing Raphael's works, "I also am a painter"; he felt a kindred spirit in his own breast.—I said, I recollected when I was formerly trying to paint, nothing gave me the horrors so much as passing the old battered portraits at the doors of brokers' shops, with the morning-sun flaring full upon them. I was generally inclined to prolong my walk, and put off painting for that day; but the sight of a fine picture had a contrary effect, and I went back and set to work with redoubled ardour.

Northcote happened to speak of a gentleman married to one of the ——, of whom a friend had said, laughing, "There's a man that's in love with his own wife!" He mentioned the beautiful Lady F—— P——, and said her hair, which was in great quantities and very fine, was remarkable for having a single lock different from all the rest, which he supposed she cherished as a beauty. I told him I had not long ago seen the hair of Lucretia Borgia, of Milton, Buonaparte, and Dr. Johnson, all folded up in the same paper. It had belonged to Lord Byron. Northcote replied, one could not be sure of that; it was easy to get a lock of hair, and call it by any name one pleased. In some cases, however, one might rely on its being the same. Mrs. G[wyn] had certainly a lock of Goldsmith's hair, for she and her sister [Miss Horneck] had wished to

have some remembrance of him after his death ; and though the coffin was nailed up, it was opened again at their request (such was the regard Goldsmith was known to have for them !), and a lock of his hair was cut off, which Mrs. G[wyn] still has. Northcote said, Goldsmith's death was the severest blow Sir Joshua ever received—he did not paint all that day ! It was proposed to make a grand funeral for him, but Reynolds objected to this, as it would be over in a day, and said it would be better to lay by the money to erect a monument to him in Westminster Abbey ; and he went himself and chose the spot. Goldsmith had begun another novel, of which he read the first chapter to the Miss Hornecks a little before his death.

Northcote asked, what I thought of the *Vicar of Wakefield* ? And I answered, What everybody else did. He said there was that mixture of the ludicrous and the pathetic running through it, which particularly delighted him : it gave a stronger resemblance to nature. He thought this justified Shakspeare in mingling up farce and tragedy together : life itself was a tragi-comedy. Instead of being pure, everything was chequered. If you went to an execution, you would perhaps see an apple-woman in the greatest distress, because her stall was overturned, at which you could not help smiling. We then spoke of *Retaliation*, and praised the character of Burke in particular as a masterpiece. Nothing that he had ever said or done but what was foretold in it ; nor was he painted as the principal figure in the fore-

ground with the partiality of a friend, or as the great man of the day, but with a background of history, showing both what he was and what he might have been. Northcote repeated some lines from the *Traveller*, which were distinguished by a beautiful transparency, by simplicity and originality. He confirmed Boswell's account of Goldsmith, as being about the middle height, rather clumsy, and tawdry in his dress.

A gentleman came in who had just shown his good taste in purchasing three pictures of Northcote, one a head of Sir Joshua by himself, and the other two by Northcote, a whole-length portrait of an Italian girl, and a copy of Omai, the South-Sea Chief. I could hear the artist in the outer room expressing some scruples as to the consistency of his parting with one of them which he had brought from abroad, according to the strict letter of his Custom House oath—an objection which the purchaser, a Member of Parliament, overruled by assuring him that “the peculiar case could not be contemplated by the spirit of the act.” Northcote also expressed some regret at the separation from pictures that had become old friends. He however comforted himself that they would now find a respectable asylum, which was better than being knocked about in garrets and auction-rooms, as they would inevitably be at his death. “You may at least depend upon it,” said Mr. —— “that they will not be sold again for many generations !”

This view into futurity brought back to my mind the time when I had first known these pictures: since then, my life was flown, and with it the hope of fame as an artist (with which I had once regarded them), and I felt a momentary pang. Northcote took me out into the other room, when his friend was gone, to look at them; and on my expressing my admiration of the portrait of the Italian lady, he said she was the mother of Madame Bellocchi, and was still living; that he had painted it at Rome about the year 1780; that her family was originally Greek, and that he had known her, her daughter, her mother, and grandmother. She and a sister who was with her, were at that time full of the most charming gaiety and innocence. The old woman used to sit upon the ground without moving or speaking, with her arm over her head, and exactly like a bundle of old clothes.

Alas! thought I, what are we but a heap of clay resting upon the earth, and ready to crumble again into dust and ashes!

CONVERSATION THE THIRTEENTH

NORTHCOTE spoke about the failure of some print-sellers. He said, "He did not wonder at it; it was a just punishment of their presumption and ignorance. They went into an Exhibition, looked round them, fixed upon some contemptible performance, and without knowing anything about the matter or consulting anybody, ordered two or three thousands pounds' worth of prints from it, merely out of purse-proud insolence, and because the money *burnt in their pockets*. Such people fancied that the more money they laid out, the more they must get; so that extravagance became (by the turn their vanity gave to it) another name for thrift."

Having spoken of a living artist's pictures as mere portraits that were interesting to no one except the people who sat for them, he remarked, "There was always something in the meanest face that a great artist could take advantage of. That was the merit of Sir Joshua, who contrived to throw a certain air and character even over ugliness and folly, that disarmed criticism and made you wonder

how he did it. This, at least, is the case with his portraits; for though he made his beggars look like heroes, he sometimes, in attempting history, made his heroes look like beggars. Grandi, the Italian colour-grinder, sat to him for King Henry VI. in the 'Death of Cardinal Beaufort,' and he looks not much better than a train-bearer or one in a low and mean station: if he had sat to him for his portrait, he would have made him look like a king! That was what made Fuseli observe in joke that 'Grandi never held up his head after Sir Joshua painted him in his Cardinal Beaufort!' But the pictures I speak of are poor dry facsimiles (in a little timid manner and with an attempt at drapery) of imbecile creatures, whose appearance is a satire on themselves and mankind. Neither can I conceive why L[awrence] should be sent over to paint Charles X.¹ A French artist said to me on that occasion, 'We have very fine portrait-painters in Paris, sir!' . . . The poor engraver would be the greatest sufferer by these expensive prints. Tradespeople nowadays did not look at the thing with an eye to business, but ruined themselves and others by setting up for *would-be* patrons and judges of the art.

“‘Some demon whisper'd, Visto, have a taste!’”

I said I thought L[awrence]'s pictures might do very well as mirrors for personal vanity to contemplate itself in (as you looked in the glass to see how you

¹ In 1825. [ED.]

were dressed), but that it was a mistake to suppose they would interest any one else or were addressed to the world at large. They were private, not public property. They never caught the eye in a shop-window ; but were (as it appeared to me) a kind of *lithographic* painting, or thin, meagre outlines without the depth and richness of the art.

I mentioned to Northcote the pleasure I had formerly taken in a little print of Gadshill from a sketch of his own, which I used at one time to pass a certain shop-window on purpose to look at. He said, "It was impossible to tell beforehand what would hit the public. You might as well pretend to say what ticket would turn up a prize in the lottery. It was not chance neither, but some unforeseen coincidence between the subject and the prevailing taste, that you could not possibly be a judge of. I had once painted two pictures ; one of a Fortune-teller (a boy with a monkey), and another called 'The Visit to the Grandmother' ; and Raphael Smith¹ came to me and wanted to engrave them, being willing to give a handsome sum for the first, but only to do the last as an experiment. He sold ten times as many of the last as of the first, and told me that there were not less than five different impressions done of it in Paris ; and once when I went to his house to get one to complete a set of engravings after my designs, they asked me six guineas for a proof-impression !

¹ John Raphael Smith (1752-1812), the mezzotint engraver, in the early part of his career an admirable artist. [ED.]

This was too much, but I was delighted that I could not afford to pay for my own work, from the value that was set upon it!"—I said, people were much alarmed at the late failures, and thought there would be a "blow-up," in the vulgar phrase.—"Surely you can't suppose so? A blow-up! Yes, of adventurers and upstarts, but not of the country, if they mean that. This is like the man who thought that gin-drinking would put an end to the world. Oh! no—the country will go on just as before, bating the distress to individuals. You may form an idea on the subject if you ever go to look at the effects of a fire the day after: you see nothing but smoke and ruins and bare walls, and think the damage can never be repaired; but if you pass by the same way a week after, you will find the houses all built up just as they were before or even better than ever! No, there is the same wealth, the same industry and ingenuity in the country as there was before; and till you destroy that, you cannot destroy the country. These temporary distresses are only like disorders in the body, that carry off its bad and superfluous humours.

"My neighbour Mr. Rowe, the bookseller, informed me the other day that Signora Cecilia Davies frequently came to his shop, and always inquired after me. Did you ever hear of her?" No, never! "She must be very old now.¹ Fifty years ago, in

¹ She must have been ninety, if it be correct that she was born in 1740. She was a very famous singer in her day, and lived on until 1836. [ED.]

the time of Garrick, she made a vast sensation. All England rang with her name. I do assure you, that in this respect Madame Catalani was not more talked of. Afterwards she had retired to Florence, and was the *Prima Donna* there, when Storace first came out. This was at the time when Mr. Hoare and myself were in Italy; and I remember we went to call upon her. She had then in a great measure fallen off, but she was still very much admired. What a strange thing a reputation of this kind is, that the person herself survives, and sees the meteors of fashion rise and fall one after another, while she remains totally disregarded as if there had been no such person, yet thinking all the while that she was better than any of them! I have hardly heard her name mentioned in the last thirty years, though in her time she was quite as famous as any one since."

I said, an *Opera*-reputation was after all but a kind of *Private Theatricals* and confined to a small circle, compared with that of the regular stage, which all the world were judges of and took an interest in. It was but the echo of a sound, or like the blaze of phosphorus that did not communicate to the surrounding objects. It belonged to a fashionable *coterie*, rather than to the public, and might easily die away at the end of the season. I then observed I was more affected by the fate of players than by that of any other class of people. They seemed to me more to be pitied than anybody—the contrast was so great between the glare,

the noise, and intoxication of their first success, and the mortifications and neglect of their declining years. They were made drunk with popular applause ; and when this stimulus was withdrawn, must feel the insignificance of ordinary life particularly vapid and distressing. There were no sots like the *sots of vanity*. There were no traces left of what they had been, any more than of a forgotten dream ; and they had no consolation but in their own conceit, which, when it was without other vouchers, was a very uneasy comforter. I had seen some actors who had been favourites in my youth and “cried up in the top of the compass,” treated, from having grown old and infirm, with the utmost indignity and almost hooted from the stage. I had seen poor — come forward under these circumstances to stammer out an apology with the tears in his eyes (which almost brought them into mine) to a set of apprentice-boys and box-lobby loungers, who neither knew nor cared what a fine performer and a fine gentleman he was thought twenty years ago. Players were so far particularly unfortunate. The theatrical public have a very short memory. Every four or five years there is a new audience, who know nothing but of what they have before their eyes, and who pronounce summarily upon this, without any regard to past obligations or past services, and with whom the veterans of the stage stand a bad chance indeed, as their former triumphs are entirely forgotten, while they appear as living vouchers against themselves.

“Do you remember,” said Northcote, “Sheridan’s beautiful lines on the subject in his *Monody on Garrick?*” I said, I did; and that it was probably the reading them early that had impressed this feeling so strongly on my mind. Northcote then remarked, “I think a great beauty is most to be pitied. She completely outlives herself. She has been used to the most bewitching homage, to have the highest court paid and the most flattering things said to her by all those who approach her, and to be received with looks of delight and surprise wherever she comes; and she afterwards not only finds herself deprived of all this and reduced to a cypher, but she sees it all transferred to another, who has become the reigning toast and beauty of the day in her stead. It must be a most violent shock. It is like a king who is dethroned and reduced to serve as a page in his own palace. I remember once being struck with seeing the Duchess of ——, the same that Sir Joshua painted, and who was a miracle of beauty when she was young, and followed by crowds wherever she went—I was coming out of Mrs. W——’s; and on the landing-place, there was she standing by herself, and calling over the bannister for her servant to come to her. If she had been as she once was, a thousand admirers would have flown to her assistance; but her face was painted over like a mask, and there was hardly any appearance of life left but the restless motion of her eyes. I was really hurt.”

I answered, the late Queen had much the same painful look that he described—her face highly *rouged*, and her eyes rolling in her head like an automaton, but she had not the mortification of having ever been a great beauty. “There was a Miss ——, too,” Northcote added, “who was a celebrated beauty when she was a girl, and who also sat to Sir Joshua. I saw her not long ago and she was grown as coarse and vulgar as possible; she was like an apple-woman or would do to keep the Three Tuns. The change must be very mortifying. To be sure, there is one thing, it comes on by degrees. The ravages of the small-pox must formerly have been a dreadful blow!” He said, literary men or men of talent in general were the best off in this respect. The reputation they acquired was not only lasting, but gradually grew stronger, if it was deserved. I agreed they were seldom spoiled by flattery, and had no reason to complain *after they were dead*. “Nor while they are living,” said Northcote, “if it is not their own fault.”

He mentioned an instance of a trial about an engraving where he, West, and others had to appear, and of the respect that was shown them. Erskine, after flourishing away, made an attempt to puzzle Stothard by drawing two angles on a piece of paper, an acute and an obtuse one, and asking, “Do you mean to say these two are alike?”—“Yes, I do,” was the answer. “I see,” said Erskine, turning round, “there is nothing to be got by *angling* here!”

West was then called upon to give his evidence, and there was immediately a lane made for him to come forward, and a stillness that you could hear a pin drop. The Judge (Lord Kenyon) then addressed him, "Sir Benjamin, we shall be glad to hear your opinion!" Mr. West answered, "He had never received the honour of a title from His Majesty;" and proceeded to explain the difference between the two engravings which were charged with being copies the one of the other, with such clearness and knowledge of the art, though in general he was a bad speaker, that Lord Kenyon said when he had done, "I suppose, gentlemen, you are perfectly satisfied—I perceive there is much more in this than I had any idea of, and am sorry I did not make it more my study when I was young!"

I remarked that I believed corporations of art or letters might meet with a certain attention; but it was the stragglers and candidates that were knocked about with very little ceremony. Talent or merit only wanted a frame of some sort or other to set it off to advantage. Those of my way of thinking were "bitter bad judges" on this point. A Tory scribe who treated mankind as rabble and *canaille*, was regarded by them in return as a fine gentleman: a reformer like myself, who stood up for liberty and equality, was taken at his word by the very journeymen that set up his paragraphs, and could not get a civil answer from the meanest shop-boy in the employ of those on his own side of the question.

Northcote laughed and said, I irritated myself too much about such things. He said it was one of Sir Joshua's maxims that the art of life consisted in not being upset by trifles. We should look at the bottom of the account, not at each individual item in it, and see how the balance stands at the end of the year. We should be satisfied if the path of life is clear before us, and not fret at the straws or pebbles that lie in our way. What you have to look to is whether you can get what you write printed, and whether the public will read it, and not to busy yourself with the remarks of shop-boys or printers' devils. They can do you neither harm nor good. The impertinence of mankind is a thing that no one can guard against.

CONVERSATION THE FOURTEENTH

NORTHCOTE showed me a poem¹ with engravings of Dartmoor, which were too fine by half. I said I supposed Dartmoor would look more gay and smiling after having been thus illustrated, like a dull author who has been praised by a Reviewer. I had once been nearly benighted there and was delighted to get to the inn at Ashburton. "That," said Northcote, "is the only good of such places that you are glad to escape from them, and look back to them with a pleasing horror ever after. Commend me to the Valdarno or Vallambrosa, where you are never weary of new charms, and which you quit with a sigh of regret. I have, however, told my young friend who sent me the poem, that he has shown his genius in creating beauties where there were none, and extracting enthusiasm from rocks and quagmires. After that, he may write a very interesting poem on Kamschatka!"

He then spoke of the Panorama of the North Pole which had been lately exhibited, of the ice-

¹ This was, no doubt, the *Dartmoor* of the Devonshire poet, Noel Thomas Carrington, which appeared in 1826. [Ed.]

bergs, the seals lying asleep on the shore, and the strange twilight as well worth seeing. He said, it would be curious to know the effect, if they could get to the Pole itself, though it must be impossible: the veins, he should suppose, would burst, and the vessel itself go to pieces from the extreme cold.

I asked if he had ever read an account of twelve men who had been left all the winter in Greenland, and of the dreadful shifts to which they were reduced? He said, he had not.—They were obliged to build two booths of wood one within the other; and if they had to go into the outer one during the severity of the weather, unless they used great precaution, their hands were blistered by whatever they took hold of as if it had been red-hot iron. The most interesting part was the account of their waiting for the return of light at the approach of spring, and the delight with which they first saw the sun shining on the tops of the frozen mountains.

Northcote said, "This is the great advantage of descriptions of extraordinary situations by uninformed men: Nature as it were holds the pen for them; they give you what is most striking in the circumstances, and there is nothing to draw off the attention from the strong and actual impression, so that it is the next thing to the reality. G[odwin] was here the other day, and I showed him the note from my bookseller about the *Fables*,¹ with

¹ The joint production of Northcote, whose name they bore, and Hazlitt himself. [ED.]

which you were so much pleased, but he saw nothing in it." I then said G[odwin] is not one of those who look attentively at nature or draw much from that source. Yet the rest is but like building castles in the air, if it is not founded in observation and experience. Or it is like the enchanted money in the *Arabian Nights*, which turned to dry leaves when you came to make use of it. It is ingenious and amusing, and so far it is well to be amused when you can ; but you learn nothing from the fine hypothesis you have been reading, which is only a better sort of dream, bright and vague and utterly inapplicable to the purposes of common life. G[odwin] does not appeal to nature, but to art and execution. There is another thing (which it seems harsh and presumptuous to say, but) he appears to me not always to perceive the difference between right and wrong. There are many others in the same predicament, though not such splendid examples of it. He is satisfied to make out a plausible case, to give the *pros* and *cons* like a lawyer ; but he has no instinctive bias or feeling one way or other, except as he can give a studied reason for it. Common sense is out of the question : such people despise common sense, and the quarrel between them is a mutual one. *Caleb Williams*, notwithstanding, is a decidedly original work : the rest are the sweepings of his study. That is but one thing, to be sure ; but no one does more than one thing.

Northcote said that Sir Joshua used to say that no

one produced more than six original things. "I always said it was wrong to fix upon this number—five out of the six would be found upon examination to be repetitions of the first. A man can no more produce six original works than he can be six individuals at once. Whatever is the strong and prevailing bent of his genius, he will stamp upon some master-work; and what he does else, will be only the same thing over again, a little better or a little worse; or if he goes out of his way in search of variety and to avoid himself, he will merely become a commonplace man or an imitator of others. You see this plainly enough in Cervantes—that he has exhausted himself in the *Don Quixote*. He has put his whole strength into it; his other works are no better than what other people could write.

"If there is any exception, it is Shakspeare: he seems to have had the faculty of dividing himself into a number of persons. His writings stand out from everything else, and from one another. Othello, Lear, Macbeth, Falstaff are striking and original characters; but they die a natural death at the end of the fifth act, and no more come to life again than the people themselves would. He is not reduced to repeat himself or revive former inventions under feigned names. This is peculiar to him: still it is to be considered that plays are short works and only allow room for the expression of a part. But in a work of the extent of *Don Quixote*, the writer had scope to bring in all he wanted; and indeed there is

no point of excellence which he has not touched from the highest courtly grace and most romantic enthusiasm down to the lowest ribaldry and rustic ignorance, yet carried off with such an air that you wish nothing away, and do not see what can be added to it. Every bit is perfect; and the author has evidently given his whole mind to it. That is why I believe that the Scotch Novels are the production of several hands. Some parts are careless, others straggling: it is only where there is an opening for effect that the master-hand comes in, and in general he leaves his work for others to get on with it. But in *Don Quixote* there is not a single line that you may not swear belongs to Cervantes."

I inquired if he had read *Woodstock*? He answered, No, he had not been able to get it. I said, I had been obliged to pay five shillings for the loan of it at a regular bookseller's shop (I could not procure it at the circulating libraries), and that from the understood feeling about Sir Walter no objection was made to this proposal, which would in ordinary cases have been construed into an affront. I had well-nigh repented my bargain, but there were one or two scenes that repaid me (though none equal to his best), and in general it was very indifferent. The plot turned chiefly on English ghost-scenes, a very mechanical sort of phantoms who dealt in practical jokes and personal annoyances, turning beds upside down and sousing you all over with water, instead of supernatural and

visionary horrors. It was very bad indeed, but might be intended to contrast the literal, matter-of-fact imagination of the Southron with the loftier impulses of Highland superstition. Charles II. was not spared, and was brought in admirably (when in disguise) as a raw, awkward Scotch lad, Master Kerneguy. Cromwell was made a fine, bluff, overbearing blackguard, who exercised a personal superiority wherever he came, but was put in situations which I thought wholly out of character, and for which I apprehended there was no warrant in the history of the times. They were therefore so far improper. A romance-writer might take an incident and work it out according to his fancy or might build an imaginary superstructure on the ground of history, but he had no right to transpose the facts.

For instance, he had made Cromwell act as his own tip-staff and go to Woodstock to take Charles II. in person. To be sure, he had made him display considerable firmness and courage in the execution of this errand (as Lavender might in being the first to enter a window to secure a desperate robber)—but the plan itself, to say nothing of the immediate danger, was contrary to Cromwell's dignity as well as policy. Instead of wishing to seize Charles with his own hand, he would naturally keep as far aloof from such a scene as he could, and be desirous to have it understood that he was anxious to shed as little more blood as possible. Besides, he had higher objects in view, and would, I should think, care not much more about

Charles than about Master Kerneguy. He would be glad to let him get away. In another place, he had made Cromwell start back in the utmost terror at seeing a picture of Charles I. and act all the phrenzy of Macbeth over again at the sight of Banquo's ghost. This I should also suppose to be quite out of character in a person of Cromwell's prosaic, determined habits *to fear a painted devil*.

"No," said Northcote, "that is not the way he would look at it; it is seeing only a part: but Cromwell was a greater philosopher than to act so. The other story is more probable of his visiting the dead body of Charles in a mask, and exclaiming in great agitation as he left the room, *Cruel necessity!* Yet even this is not sufficiently authenticated. No; he knew that it was come to this, that it was gone too far for either party to turn back, and that it must be final with one of them. The only question was whether he should give himself up as the victim, and so render all that had been done useless, or exact the penalty from what he thought the offending party. It was like a battle which must end fatally either way, and no one thought of lamenting, because he was not on the losing side. In a great public quarrel there was no room for these domestic and personal regards: all you had to do was to consider well the justice of the cause, before you appealed to the sword. Would Charles I., if he had been victorious, have started at the sight of a picture of Cromwell? Yet Cromwell

was as much of a man as he, and as firm as the other was obstinate."

Northcote said, he wished he could remember the subject of a dispute he had with G[odwin] to see if I did not think he had the best of it. I replied, I should be more curious to hear something in which G[odwin] was right, for he generally made it a rule to be in the wrong in speaking of anything. I mentioned having once had a very smart debate with him about a young lady, of whom I had been speaking as very much like her aunt, a celebrated authoress, and as what the latter, I conceived, might have been at her time of life. G[odwin] said, when Miss——did anything like *Evelina* or *Cecilia*, he should then believe she was as clever as Madame d'Arblay.

I asked him whether he did not think Miss Burney was as clever before she wrote those novels as she was after; or whether in general an author wrote a successful work for being clever, or was clever because he had written a successful work? Northcote laughed and said, "That was so like G[odwin]." I observed that it arose out of his bigoted admiration of literature, so that he could see no merit in anything else; nor trust to any evidence of talent but what was printed. It was much the same fallacy that had sometimes struck me in the divines, who deduced original sin from Adam's eating the apple, and not his eating the apple from original sin or a previous inclination to do something, that he should not.

Northcote remarked, that speaking of *Evelina* put him in mind of what Opie had once told him, that when Dr. Johnson sat to him for his picture, on his first coming to town, he asked him if it was true that he had sat up all night to read Miss Burney's new novel, as it had been reported? And he made answer, "I never read it through at all, though I don't wish this to be known." Sir Joshua also pretended to have read it through at a sitting, though it appeared to him (Northcote) affectation in them both, who were thorough-paced men of the world, and hackneyed in literature, to pretend to be so delighted with the performance of a girl, in which they could find neither instruction nor any great amusement, except from the partiality of friendship. So Johnson cried up Savage, because they had slept on bulks when they were young; and lest he should be degraded into a vagabond by the association, had elevated the other into a genius. Such prevarication or tampering with his own convictions was not consistent with the strict and formal tone of morality which he assumed on other and sometimes very trifling occasions, such as correcting Mrs. Thrale for saying that a bird flew in at the door, instead of the window.

I said, Savage, in my mind, was one of those writers (like Chatterton) whose vices and misfortunes the world made a *set-off* to their genius, because glad to connect these ideas together. They were only severe upon those who attacked their prejudices or their consequence. Northcote replied,

“Savage the architect¹ was here the other day, and asked me why I had abused his namesake, and called him an impostor. I answered, I had heard that character of him from a person in an obscure rank of life, who had known him a little before his death.”

Northcote proceeded: “People in that class are better judges than poets and moralists, who explain away everything by fine words and doubtful theories. The mob are generally right in their summary judgments upon offenders. A man is seldom ducked or pumped upon or roughly handled by them, unless he has deserved it. You see that in the galleries at the play-house. They never let anything pass that is immoral; and they are even fastidious judges of wit. I remember there was some gross expression in Goldsmith’s comedy the first night it came out; and there was a great uproar in the gallery, and it was obliged to be suppressed. Though rude and vulgar themselves, they do not like vulgarity on the stage; they come there to be taught manners.”

I said, they paid more attention than anybody else; and after the curtain drew up (though somewhat noisy before) were the best-behaved part of the audience, unless something went wrong. As the common people sought for refinement as a *treat*, people in high life were fond of grossness and

¹ James Savage (1779-1852), best known for his work at the Middle Temple. [ED.]

ribaldry as a relief to their overstrained affectation of gentility. I could account in no other way for their being amused with the wretched *slang* in certain magazines and newspapers.

I asked Northcote if he had seen the third series of ——? He had not. I said they were like the composition of a footman, and I believed greatly admired in the upper circles, who were glad to see an author arrange a sideboard for them over again with servile alacrity. He said, "They delight in low, coarse buffoonery, because it sets off their own superiority: whereas the rabble resent it when obtruded upon them, because they think it is meant against themselves. They require the utmost elegance and propriety for their money: as the showman says in Goldsmith's comedy—'My bear dances to none but the genteelest of tunes, *Water parted from the Sea*, or the minuet in *Ariadne!*'"

Northcote then alluded to a new novel he had been reading. He said he never read a book so full of words; which seemed ridiculous enough to say, for a book was necessarily composed of words, but here there was nothing else but words, to a degree that was surprising. Yet he believed it was sought after, and indeed he could not get it at the common library. "You are to consider, there must be books for all tastes and all ages. You may despise it, but the world do not. There are books for children till the time they are six years of age, such as *Jack-the-Giant-killer*, the *Seven Champions of Christendom*,

Guy of Warwick, and others.¹ From that to twelve they like to read the *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe* and then Fielding's Novels and *Don Quixote* : from twenty to thirty, books of poetry, Milton, Pope, Shakspeare : and from thirty, history and philosophy —what suits us then will serve us for the rest of our lives. For boarding-school girls Thomson's *Seasons* has an immense attraction, though I never could read it. Some people cannot get beyond a newspaper or a geographical dictionary. What I mean to infer is that we ought not to condemn too hastily, for a work may be approved by the public, though it does not exactly hit our taste ; nay, those may seem beauties to others which seem faults to us. Why else do we pride ourselves on the superiority of our judgment, if we are not more advanced in this respect than the majority of readers? But our very fastidiousness should teach us toleration. You have said very well of this novel, that it is a mixture of genteel and romantic affectation. One objection to the excessive rhodomontade which abounds in it is that you can learn nothing from such extravagant fictions :—they are like nothing in the known world.

“I remember once speaking to Richardson (Sheridan's friend) about Shakspeare's want of morality, and he replied—‘What ! Shakspeare not moral? He is the most moral of all writers, because he is the most natural !’ And in this he was right : for though Shakspeare did not intend to be moral, yet he could

¹ See a paper on this subject in the *Tatler*. [HAZLITT.]

not be otherwise as long as he adhered to the path of nature. Morality only teaches us our duty by showing us the natural consequences of our actions ; and the poet does the same while he continues to give us faithful and affecting pictures of human life—rewarding the good and punishing the bad. So far truth and virtue are one. But that kind of poetry which has not its foundation in nature, and is only calculated to shock and surprise, tends to unhinge our notions of morality and of everything else in the ordinary course of Providence.”

Something being said of an artist who had attempted to revive the great style in our times, and the question being put, whether Michael Angelo and Raphael, had they lived now, would not have accommodated themselves to the modern practice, I said, it appeared to me that (whether this was the case or not) they could not have done what they did without the aid of circumstances ; that for an artist to raise himself above all surrounding opinions, customs, and institutions by a mere effort of the will, was affectation and folly, like attempting to fly in the air ; and that, though great genius might exist without the opportunities favourable to its development, yet it must draw its nourishment from circumstances, and suck in inspiration from its native air.

There was Hogarth—he was surely a genius ; still the manners of his age were necessary to him : teeming as his works were with life, character, and

spirit, they would have been poor and vapid without the night-cellars of St. Giles's, the drawing-rooms of St. James's! Would he in any circumstances have been a Raphael or a Phidias? I think not. But had he been twenty times a Raphael or a Phidias, I am quite sure it would never have appeared in the circumstances in which he was placed. Two things are necessary to all great works and great excellence, the mind of the individual and the mind of the age or country co-operating with his own genius. The last brings out the first, but the first does not imply or supersede the last. Pictures for Protestant churches are a contradiction in terms, where they are not objects of worship but of idle curiosity:—where there is not the adoration, the enthusiasm in the spectator, how can it exist in the artist? The spark of genius is only kindled into a flame by sympathy.

Northcote spoke highly of Vanbrugh and of the calm superiority with which he bore the attacks of Swift, Pope, and that set who made a point of decrying all who did not belong to their party. He said Burke and Sir Joshua thought his architecture far from contemptible; and his comedies were certainly first-rate. Richards¹ (the scene-painter) had told him, the players thought the *Provoked Husband* the best acting play on the stage; and Godwin said the *City Wives' Confederacy* (taken from an indifferent French play) was

¹ John Inigo Richards, R.A., who died in 1810; for many years, in his youth, scene-painter to Covent Garden Theatre. [Ed.]

the best written one. I ventured to add, that the *Trip to Scarborough* (altered but not improved by Sheridan) was not inferior to either of the others. I should doubt whether the direction given at Sir Tunbelly's castle on the arrival of Young Fashion—"Let loose the greyhound, and lock up Miss Hoyden!"—would be in Sheridan's version, who, like most of his countrymen, had a prodigious ambition of elegance.

Northcote observed, that talking of this put him in mind of a droll speech that was made when the officers got up a play on board the vessel that went lately to find out the North-West passage:—one of the sailors, who was admiring the performance, and saying how clever it was, was interrupted by the boatswain, who exclaimed, "Clever! did you say? I call it *philosophy*, by God!"

He asked, if he had ever mentioned to me that anecdote of Lord Mansfield, who, when an old woman was brought before him as a witch, and was charged, among other improbable things, with walking through the air, attended coolly to the evidence, and then dismissed the complaint by saying, "My opinion is that this good woman be suffered to return home, and whether she shall do this, walking on the ground or riding through the air, must be left entirely to her own pleasure, for there is nothing contrary to the laws of England in either!"

I mentioned a very fine dancer at the Opera

(Mademoiselle Brocard) with whom I was much delighted; and Northcote observed that where there was grace and beauty accompanying the bodily movements, it was very hard to deny the mental refinement or the merit of this art. He could not see why that which was so difficult to do, and which gave so much pleasure to others, was to be despised. He remembered seeing some young people at Parma (though merely in a country-dance) exhibit a degree of perfection in their movements that seemed to be inspired by the very genius of grace and gaiety. Miss Reynolds used to say that perfection was much the same in everything—nobody could assign the limits. I said authors alone were privileged to suppose that all excellence was confined to words. Till I was twenty I thought there was nothing in the world but books: when I began to paint I found there were two things, both difficult to do and worth doing; and I concluded from that time there might be fifty. At least I was willing to allow every one his own choice. I recollect a certain poet¹ saying “he should like to *hamstring* those fellows at the Opera”—I suppose because the Great would rather see them dance than read *Kehama*. Whatever can be done in such a manner that you can fancy a God to do it, must have something in its nature divine. The ancients had assigned Gods to dancing as well as to music and poetry, to the different attributes and perfections both of body and mind; and perhaps the plurality of

¹ Southey. [ED.]

the heathen deities was favourable to a liberality of taste and opinion.

NORTHCOTE: "The most wretched scribbler looks down upon the greatest painter as a mere mechanic: but who would compare Lord Byron with Titian?"

CONVERSATION THE FIFTEENTH

I WENT to Northcote in the evening to consult about his *Fables*. He was downstairs in the parlour, and talked much as usual: but the difference of the accompaniments, the sitting down, the preparations for tea, the carpet and furniture, and a little fat lap-dog, interfered with old associations and took something from the charm of his conversation. He spoke of a Mr. Laird who had been employed to see his *Life of Sir Joshua* through the press, and whom he went to call upon in an upper story in Peterborough Court, Fleet Street, where he was surrounded by his books, his implements of writing, a hand-organ, and his coffee-pots; and he said he envied him this retreat more than any palace he had ever happened to enter.

Northcote was not very well, and repeated his complaints. I said I thought the air (now summer was coming on) would do him more good than physic. His apothecary had been describing the dissection of the elephant, which had just been killed at Exeter 'Change. It appeared that instead of the oil which usually is found in the joints of animals, the interstices were in this case filled up with a substance

resembling a kind of white paint. This Northcote considered as a curious instance of the wise contrivance of nature in the adaptation of means to ends ; for even in pieces of artificial mechanism, though they use oil to lubricate the springs and wheels of clocks and other common-sized instruments, yet in very large and heavy ones, such as steam engines, etc., they are obliged to use grease, pitch, and other more solid substances, to prevent the friction. If they could dissect a flea, what a fine, evanescent fluid would be found to lubricate its slender joints and assist its light movements !

Northcote said the bookseller wished to keep the original copy of the *Fables* to bind up as a literary curiosity. I objected to this proceeding as unfair. There were several slips of the pen and slovenlinesses of style (for which I did not think him at all accountable, since an artist wrote with his left hand, and painted with his right) and I did not see why these accidental inadvertences, arising from diffidence and want of practice, should be as it were enshrined and brought against him. He said, "Mr. P[rince] H[oare] tasked me the hardest in what I wrote in the *Artist*. He pointed out where I was wrong, and sent it back to me to correct it. After all, what I did there was thought the best !"

I said Mr. H[oare] was too fastidious, and spoiled what he did from a wish to have it perfect. He dreaded that a shadow of objection should be brought against anything he advanced, so that his opinions at last amounted to a kind

of genteel truisms. One must risk something in order to do anything. I observed that this was remarkable in so clever a man; but it seemed as if there were some fatality by which the most lively and whimsical writers, if they went out of their own eccentric path and attempted to be serious, became exceedingly grave and even insipid. His farces were certainly very spirited and original: *No Song no Supper*¹ was the first play I had ever seen, and I felt grateful to him for this.

Northcote agreed that it was very delightful; and said there was a volume of it when he first read it to them one night at Mrs. Rundle's, and that the players cut it down a good deal and supplied a number of things. There was a great piece of work to alter the songs for Madame Storace, who played in it and who could not pronounce half the English terminations. *My Grandmother*,² too, was a laughable idea, very ingeniously executed; and some of the songs in this had an equal portion of elegance and drollery, such as that in particular—

“For alas! long before I was born,
My fair one had died of old age!”

Still some of his warmest admirers were hurt at their being farces—if they had been comedies, they would have been satisfied, for nothing could be greater than

¹ A musical farce, by Prince Hoare and Storace, produced with great success at Drury Lane in 1790. [ED.]

² Another of Prince Hoare's long-popular musical farces; this was first produced in 1796, at Drury Lane. [ED.]

their success. They were the next to O'Keefe's, who in that line was the English Molière.

Northcote asked if I remembered the bringing out of any of O'Keefe's? I answered, No. He said, "It had the oddest effect imaginable—at one moment they seemed on the point of being damned, and the next moment you were convulsed with laughter. Edwin was inimitable in some of them. He was one of those actors, it is true, who carried a great deal off the stage with him, that he would willingly have left behind, and so far could not help himself. But his awkward, shambling figure in Bowkitt the dancing-master, was enough to make one die with laughing. He was also unrivalled in Lingo, where he was admirably supported by Mrs. Wells in Cowslip, when she prefers 'a roast duck' to all the birds in the Heathen Mythology—and in Peeping Tom, where he merely puts his head out, the faces that he made threw the audience into a roar." I said, I remembered no further back than B——¹, who used to delight me excessively in Lenitive in the *Prize*,² when I was a boy. Northcote said, he was an imitator of Edwin, but at a considerable distance. He was a good-natured, agreeable man; and the audience were delighted with him, because he was evidently delighted with them. In some respects he was a caricaturist: for instance, in Lenitive he stuck his pigtail on end, which he had

¹ Perhaps Baddeley. [ED.]

² A musical entertainment, by Prince Hoare, brought out at Drury Lane in 1793. [ED.]

no right to do, for no one had ever done it but himself. I said, Liston appeared to me to have more comic humour than any one in my time, though he was not properly an actor. Northcote asked, if he was not low-spirited; and told the story (I suspect an old one) of his consulting a physician on the state of his health, who recommended him to go and see Liston. I said he was grave and prosing, but I did not know there was anything the matter with him, though I had seen him walking along the street the other day with his face as fixed as if he had a lockjaw, a book in his hand, looking neither to the right nor the left, and very much like his own Lord Duberly. I did not see why he and Mathews should both of them be so *hipped*, except from their having *the player's melancholy*, arising from their not seeing six hundred faces on the broad grin before them at all other times as well as when they were acting. He was, however, exceedingly unaffected, and remarkably candid in judging of other actors. He always spoke in the highest terms of Munden, whom I considered as overdoing his parts.¹

Northcote said, "Munden was excellent but an artificial actor. You should have seen Weston," he continued. "It was impossible, from looking at him, for any one to say that he was acting. You would suppose they had gone out and found the actual character they wanted, and brought

¹ The same praise may be extended to Mathews. Those who have seen this ingenious and lively actor only on the stage, do not know half his merits. [HAZLITT.]

him upon the stage without his knowing it. Even when they interrupted him with peals of laughter and applause, he looked about him as if he was not at all conscious of having anything to do with it, and then went on as before. In *Scrub*, *Dr. Last*, and other parts of that kind, he was perfection itself. Garrick would never attempt *Abel Drugger* after him. There was something peculiar in his face; for I knew an old schoolfellow of his who told me he used to produce the same effect when a boy, and when the master asked what was the matter, his companions would make answer—“*Weston looked at me, sir!*” Yet he came out in tragedy, as indeed they all did!” Northcote inquired if I had seen Garrick? I answered, “No—I could not very well, as he died the same year I was born!” I mentioned having lately met with a striking instance of genealogical taste in a family, the grandfather of which thought nothing of Garrick, the father thought nothing of *Mrs. Siddons*, and the daughter could make nothing of the *Scotch Novels*, but admired *Mr. Theodore Hook’s Sayings and Doings!*

Northcote then returned to the subject of his book and said, “*Sir Richard Phillips* once wished me to do a very magnificent work indeed on the subject of art. He was like *Curll*, who had a number of fine title-pages, if any one could have written books to answer to them. He came here once with *Godwin* to show me a picture which they had just discovered of *Chaucer*, and which was to embellish *Godwin’s Life* of him. I told them it was certainly no picture of

Chaucer, nor was any such picture painted at that time." I said, Godwin had got a portrait about a year ago which he wished me to suppose was a likeness of President Bradshaw : I saw no reason for his thinking so, but that in that case it would be worth a hundred pounds to him ! Northcote expressed a curiosity to have seen it, as he knew the descendants of the family at Plymouth. He remembered one of them, an old lady of the name of Wilcox, who used to walk about in Gibson's Field, near the town, so prim and starched, holding up her fan spread out like a peacock's tail with such an air, on account of her supposed relationship to one of the Regicides ! They paid, however (in the vulgar opinion) for this distinction ; for others of them bled to death at the nose, or died of the bursting of a blood-vessel, which their wise neighbours did not fail to consider as a judgment upon them.

Speaking of Dr. M[udge], he said, he had such a feeling of beauty in his heart, that it made angels of every one around him. To check a person who was running on against another, he once said, "You should not speak in that manner, for you lead me to suppose you have the bad qualities you are so prone to dwell upon in others."

A transition was here made to Lord Byron, who used to tell a story of a little red-haired girl, who, when countesses and ladies of fashion were leaving the room where he was in crowds (to *cut* him after his quarrel with his wife),

stopped short near a table against which he was leaning, gave him a familiar nod, and said, "You should have married *me*, and then this would not have happened to you!" A question being started whether Dr. M[udge] was handsome, Northcote answered, "I could see no beauty in him as to his outward person, but there was an angelic sweetness of disposition that spread its influence over his whole conversation and manner. He had not wit, but a fine romantic enthusiasm which deceived himself, and enchanted others. I remember once his describing a picture by Rosa de Tivoli (at Saltram) of *Two Bulls Fighting*, and he gave such an account of their rage and manner of tearing up the ground that I could not rest till we went over to see it—when we came there, it was nothing but a coarse daub like what might be expected from the painter: but he had made the rest out of a vivid imagination. So my father told him a story of a bull-bait he had seen in which the bull had run so furiously at the dog that he broke the chain and pitched upon his head and was killed. Soon after, he came and told us the same story as an incident he himself had witnessed. He did not mean to deceive, but the image had made such an impression on his fancy, that he believed it to be one that he had himself been an eye-witness of."

I was much amused with this account, and I offered to get him a copy of a whimsical production, of which a new edition had been printed. I also

recommended to him the *Spanish Rogue*, as a fine mixture of drollery and grave moralising. He spoke of *Lazarillo de Tormes* and of the *Cheats of Scapin*, the last of which he rated rather low. The work was written by Scarron, whose widow, the famous Madame de Maintenon, afterwards became mistress to Louis XIV.

CONVERSATION THE SIXTEENTH

N.—THAT is your diffidence, which I can't help thinking you carry too far. For any one of real strength, you are the humblest person I ever knew.

H.—It is owing to pride.

N.—You deny you have invention too. But it is want of practice. Your ideas run on before your executive power. It is a common case. There was Ramsay, of whom Sir Joshua used to say that he was the most sensible among all the painters of his time ; but he has left little to show it. His manner was dry and timid. He stopped short in the middle of his work, because he knew exactly how much it wanted. Now and then we find hints and sketches which show what he might have been, if his hand had been equal to his conceptions. I have seen a picture of his of the Queen, soon after she was married—a profile, and slightly done ; but it was a paragon of elegance. She had a fan in her hand : Lord ! how she held that fan ! It was weak in execution and ordinary in features—all I can say of it is, that it was the farthest possible removed from

everything like vulgarity. A professor might despise it; but in the mental part, I have never seen anything of Vandyke's equal to it. I could have looked at it for ever. I showed it to J——n;¹ and he, I believe, came into my opinion of it. I don't know where it is now; but I saw in it enough to convince me that Sir Joshua was right in what he said of Ramsay's great superiority. His own picture of the King, which is at the Academy, is a finer composition and shows greater boldness and mastery of hand; but I should find it difficult to produce anything of Sir Joshua's that conveys an idea of more grace and delicacy than the one I have mentioned. Reynolds would have finished it better: the other was afraid of spoiling what he had done, and so left it a mere outline. He was frightened before he was hurt.

H.—Taste and even genius is but a misfortune, without a correspondent degree of manual dexterity or power of language to make it manifest.

N.—W——² was here the other day. I believe you met him going out. He came, he said, to ask me about the famous people of the last age, Johnson, Burke, etc. (as I was almost the only person left who remembered them), and was curious to know what figure Sir Walter Scott would have made among them.

H.—That is so like a North-Briton—"to make

¹ Perhaps John Jackson, R.A. [ED.]

² Probably Professor John Wilson, from Northcote's gird, presently, at the Lake Poets. [ED.]

assurance doubly sure," and to procure a signature to an acknowledged reputation as if it were a receipt for the delivery of a bale of goods.

N.—I told him it was not for me to pronounce upon such men as Sir Walter Scott: they came before another tribunal. They were of that height that they were seen by all the world, and must stand or fall by the verdict of posterity. It signified little what any individual thought in such cases, it being equally an impertinence to set one's self against or to add one's testimony to the public voice; but as far as I could judge, I told him, that Sir Walter would have stood his ground in any company: neither Burke nor Johnson nor any of their admirers would have been disposed or able to set aside his pretensions. These men were not looked upon in their day as they are at present: Johnson had his *Lexiphanes*, and Goldsmith was laughed at—their merits were to the full as much called in question, nay, more so, than those of the author of *Waverley* have ever been, who has been singularly fortunate in himself or in lighting upon a barren age: but because their names have since become established, and as it were sacred, we think they were always so; and W—— wanted me, as a competent witness and as having seen both parties, to affix the same seal to his countryman's reputation, which it is not in the power of the whole of the present generation to do, much less of any single person in it. No, we must wait for this! Time alone can give the final stamp: no

living reputation can ever be of the same value or quality as posthumous fame. We must throw lofty objects to a distance in order to judge of them: if we are standing close under the Monument, it looks higher than St. Paul's. Posterity has this advantage over us—not that they are really wiser, but they see the proportions better from being placed farther off.

For instance, I liked Sir Walter, because he had an easy, unaffected manner, and was ready to converse on all subjects alike. He was not like your friends, the L[ake] poets, who talk about nothing but their own poetry. If, on the contrary, he had been stiff and pedantic, I should, perhaps, have been inclined to think less highly of the author from not liking the man; so that we can never judge fairly of men's abilities till we are no longer liable to come in contact with their persons. Friends are as little to be trusted as enemies: favour or prejudice makes the votes in either case more or less suspected; though “the vital signs that a name shall live” are in some instances so strong, that we can hardly refuse to put faith in them, and I think this is one. I was much pleased with Sir Walter, and I believe he expressed a favourable opinion of me. I said to him, “I admire the way in which you begin your novels. You set out so abruptly, that you quite surprise me. I can't at all tell what's coming.”—“No!” says Sir Walter, “nor I neither.” I then told him, that when I first read *Waverley*, I said it was no novel: nobody could invent like that. Either he had heard the

story related by one of the surviving parties, or he had found the materials in a manuscript concealed in some old chest: to which he replied, "You're not so far out of the way in thinking so." You don't know him, do you? He'd be a pattern to you. Oh! he has a very fine manner. You would learn to rub off some of your asperities. But you admire him, I believe.

H.—Yes; on this side of idolatry and Toryism.

N.—That is your prejudice.

H.—Nay, it rather shows my liberality, if I am a devoted enthusiast, notwithstanding. There are two things I admire in Sir Walter, his capacity and his simplicity; which indeed I am apt to think are much the same. The more ideas a man has of other things, the less he is taken up with the idea of himself. Every one gives the same account of the author of *Waverley* in this respect. When he was in Paris, and went to Galignani's, he sat down in an outer room to look at some book he wanted to see: none of the clerks had the least suspicion who it was: when it was found out, the place was in a commotion. Cooper, the American, was in Paris at the same time: his looks and manner seemed to announce a much greater man. He strutted through the streets with a very consequential air; and in company held up his head, screwed up his features, and placed himself on a sort of pedestal to be observed and admired, as if he never relaxed in the assumption nor wished it to be forgotten by others, that he was the American

Sir Walter Scott. The real one never troubled himself about the matter. Why should he? He might safely leave that question to others. Indeed, by what I am told, he carries his indifference too far: it amounts to an implied contempt for the public, and *misprision of treason* against the commonwealth of letters. He thinks nothing of his works, although "all Europe rings with them from side to side."—If so, he has been severely punished for his infirmity.

N.—Though you do not know Sir Walter Scott, I think I have heard you say you have seen him.

H.—Yes, he put me in mind of Cobbett, with his florid face and scarlet gown, which were just like the other's red face and scarlet waistcoat. The one is like an English farmer, the other like a Scotch *laird*. Both are large, robust men, with great strength and composure of features; but I saw nothing of the *ideal* character in the romance-writer, any more than I looked for it in the politician.

N.—Indeed! But you have a vast opinion of Cobbett too, haven't you? Oh! he's a giant! He has such prodigious strength; he tears up a subject by the roots. Did you ever read his Grammar? Or see his attack on Mrs. —? It was like a hawk pouncing on a wren. I should be terribly afraid to get into his hands. And then his homely, familiar way of writing—it is not from necessity or vulgarity, but to show his contempt for aristocratic pride and arrogance. He only has a kitchen-garden; he could have a flower-garden too if he chose. Peter Pindar

said his style was like the Horse Guards, only one story above the ground, while Junius's had all the airy elegance of Whitehall; but he could raise his style just as high as he pleased; though he does not want to sacrifice strength to elegance. He knows better what he is about.

H.—I don't think he'll set up for a fine gentleman in a hurry, though he has for a Member of Parliament; and I fancy he would make no better figure in the one than the other. He appeared to me, when I once saw him, exactly what I expected: in Sir Walter I looked in vain for a million of fine things! I could only explain it to myself in this way, that there was a degree of capacity in that huge double forehead of his, that superseded all effort, made everything come intuitively and almost mechanically, as if it were merely transcribing what was already written, and by the very facility with which the highest beauty and excellence was produced, left few traces of it in the expression of the countenance, and hardly any sense of it in the mind of the author. Expression only comes into the face as we are at a loss for words, or have a difficulty in bringing forward our ideas; but we may repeat the finest things by rote without any change of look or manner.

It is only when the powers are tasked, when the moulds of thought are full, that the effect or the *wear-and-tear* of the mind appears on the surface. So, in general, writers of the greatest imagination and range of ideas, and who might

be said to have all nature obedient to their call, seem to have been most careless of their fame and regardless of their works. They treat their productions not as children, but as "bastards of their art"; whereas those who are more confined in their scope of intellect and wedded to some one theory or predominant fancy, have been found to feel a proportionable fondness for the offspring of their brain, and have thus excited a deeper interest in it in the minds of others.

We set a value on things as they have cost us dear: the very limitation of our faculties or exclusiveness of our feelings compels us to concentrate all our enthusiasm on a favourite subject; and strange as it may sound, in order to inspire a perfect sympathy in others or to form a school, men must themselves be *egotists*! Milton has had fewer readers and admirers, but I suspect more devoted and bigoted ones, than ever Shakspeare had: Sir Walter Scott has attracted more universal attention than any writer of our time, but you may speak against him with less danger of making personal enemies than if you attack Lord Byron. Even Wordsworth has half-a-dozen followers, who set him up above everybody else from a *common idiosyncrasy* of feeling and the singleness of the elements of which his excellence is composed. Before we can take an author entirely to our bosoms, he must be another self; and he cannot be this, if he is "not one, but all mankind's epitome." It was this which gave such

an effect to Rousseau's writings, that he stamped his own character and the image of his self-love on the public mind—*there* it is, and there it will remain in spite of everything. Had he possessed more comprehension of thought or feeling, it would only have diverted him from his object. But it was the excess of his egotism and his utter blindness to everything else, that found a corresponding sympathy in the conscious feelings of every human breast, and shattered to pieces the pride of rank and circumstance by the pride of internal worth or upstart pretension.

When Rousseau stood behind the chair of the master of the *château* of [the Count of Gouvon], and smiled to hear the company dispute about the meaning of the motto of the arms of the family [of Solar], which he alone knew, and stumbled as he handed the glass of wine to his young mistress, and fancied she coloured at being waited upon by so learned a young footman—then was first kindled that spark which can never be quenched, then was formed the germ of that strong conviction of the disparity between the badge on his shoulder and the aspirations of his soul—the determination, in short, that external situation and advantages are but the mask, and that the mind is the man—armed with which, impenetrable, incorrigible, he went forth conquering and to conquer, and overthrew the monarchy of France and the hierarchies of the earth.

Till then, birth and wealth and power were all in all, though but the framework or crust that

envelops the man; and what there was in the man himself was never asked, or was scorned and forgot. And while all was dark and grovelling within; while knowledge either did not exist or was confined to a few, while material power and advantages were everything, this was naturally to be expected. But with the increase and diffusion of knowledge, this state of things must sooner or later cease; and Rousseau was the first who held the torch (lighted at the never-dying fire in his own bosom) to the hidden chambers of the mind of man—like another Prometheus, breathed into his nostrils the breath of a new and intellectual life, enraging the Gods of the earth, and made him feel what is due to himself and his fellows. Before, physical force was everything: henceforward, mind, thought, feeling was a new element—a fourth estate in society. What! shall a man have read Dante and Ariosto, and be none the better for it? Shall he be still judged of only by his coat, the number of his servants in livery, the house over his head?

While poverty meant ignorance, that was necessarily the case; but the world of books overturns the world of things, and establishes a new balance of power and scale of estimation. Shall we think only rank and pedigree divine, when we have music, poetry, and painting within us? Tut! we have read *Old Mortality*; and shall it be asked whether we have done so in a garret or a palace, in a carriage or on foot? Or knowing

them, shall we not revere the mighty heirs of fame, and respect ourselves for knowing and honouring them? This is the true march of intellect, and not the erection of *Mechanics' Institutions*, or the printing of *twopenny trash*, according to my notion of the matter, though I have nothing to say against them neither.

N.—I thought you never would have done; however, you have come to the ground at last. After this rhapsody, I must inform you that Rousseau is a character more detestable to me than I have power of language to express:—an aristocrat filled with all their worst vices, pride, ambition, conceit, and gross affectation: and though endowed with some ability, yet not sufficient ever to make him know right from wrong: witness his novel of *Eloisa*. His name brings to my mind all the gloomy horrors of a mob-government, which attempted from their ignorance to banish truth and justice from the world. I see you place Sir Walter above Lord Byron. The question is not which keeps longest on the wing, but which soars highest: and I cannot help thinking there are essences in Lord Byron that are not to be surpassed. He is on a par with Dryden. All the other modern poets appear to me vulgar in the comparison. As a lady who comes here said, there is such an air of nobility in what he writes. Then there is such a power in the style, expressions almost like Shakspeare—“And looked round on them with their *wolfish* eyes.”

H.—The expression is in Shakspeare, somewhere in *Lear*.

N.—The line I repeated is in *Don Juan*. I do not mean to vindicate the immorality or misanthropy in that poem—perhaps his lameness was to blame for this defect—but surely no one can deny the force, the spirit of it; and there is such a fund of drollery mixed up with the serious part. Nobody understood the tragi-comedy of poetry so well. People find fault with this mixture in general, because it is not well managed; there is a comic story and a tragic story going on at the same time, without their having anything to do with one another. But in Lord Byron they are brought together, just as they are in nature. In like manner, if you go to an execution at the very moment when the criminal is going to be turned off, and all eyes are fixed upon him, an old apple-woman and her stall are overturned, and all the spectators fall a-laughing.

In real life the most ludicrous incidents border on the most affecting and shocking. How fine that is of the cask of butter in the storm! Some critics have objected to it as turning the whole into burlesque; on the contrary, it is that which stamps the character of the scene more than anything else. What did the people in the boat care about the rainbow, which he has described in such vivid colours; or even about their fellow-passengers who were thrown overboard, when they only wanted to eat them? No, it was the loss of the firkin of butter that affected them more than all the rest; and it is the mention of this circumstance that adds a hardened levity and a sort

of ghastly horror to the scene. It shows the master-hand—there is such a boldness and sagacity and superiority to ordinary rules in it! I agree, however, in your admiration of the Waverley Novels: they are very fine. As I told the author, he and Cervantes have raised the idea of human nature, not as Richardson has attempted, by affectation and a false varnish, but by bringing out what there is really fine in it under a cloud of disadvantages. Have you seen the last?

H.—No.

N.—There is a character of a common smith or armourer in it, which, in spite of a number of weaknesses and in the most ludicrous situations, is made quite heroical by the tenderness and humanity it displays. It is his best, but I had not read it when I saw him. No; all that can be said against Sir Walter is, that he has never made a *whole*. There is an infinite number of delightful incidents and characters, but they are disjointed and scattered. This is one of Fielding's merits: his novels are regular compositions, with what the ancients called a *beginning*, a *middle*, and an *end*: every circumstance is foreseen and provided for, and the conclusion of the story turns round as it were to meet the beginning. *Gil Blas* is very clever, but it is only a succession of chapters. *Tom Jones* is a masterpiece, as far as regards the conduct of the fable.

H.—Do you know the reason? Fielding had a hooked nose, the long chin. It is that introverted physiognomy that binds and concentrates.

N.—But Sir Walter has not a hooked nose, but one that denotes kindness and ingenuity. Mrs. Abington had the pug-nose, who was the perfection of comic archness and vivacity: a hooked nose is my aversion.

CONVERSATION THE SEVENTEENTH

N.—I SOMETIMES get into scrapes that way by contradicting people before I have well considered the subject, and I often wonder how I get out of them so well as I do. I remember once meeting with Sir ——, who was talking about Milton; and as I have a natural aversion to a coxcomb, I differed from what he said, without being at all prepared with any arguments in support of my opinion.

H.—But you had time enough to think of them afterwards.

N.—I got through with it somehow or other. It is the very risk you run in such cases that puts you on the alert and gives you spirit to extricate yourself from it. If you had full leisure to deliberate and to make out your defence beforehand, you perhaps could not do it so well as on the spur of the occasion. The surprise and flutter of the animal spirits gives the alarm to any little wit we possess, and puts it into a state of immediate requisition.

H.—Besides, it is always easiest to defend a paradox or an opinion you don't care seriously about. I

would sooner (as a matter of choice) take the wrong side than the right in any argument. If you have a thorough conviction on any point and good grounds for it, you have studied it long, and the real reasons have sunk into the mind ; so that what you can recall of them at a sudden *pinch*, seems unsatisfactory and disproportionate to the confidence of your belief and to the magisterial tone you are disposed to assume. Even truth is a matter of habit and professorship. Reason and knowledge, when at their height, return into a kind of instinct. We understand the grammar of a foreign language best, though we do not speak it so well. But if you take up an opinion at a venture, then you lay hold of whatever excuse comes within your reach, instead of searching about for and bewildering yourself with the true reasons ; and the odds are that the arguments thus got up are as good as those opposed to them.

In fact, the more sophisticated and superficial an objection to a received or well-considered opinion is, the more we are staggered and teased by it ; and the next thing is to lose our temper, when we become an easy prey to a cool and disingenuous adversary. I would much rather (as the safest side) insist on Milton's pedantry than on his sublimity, supposing I were not in the company of very good judges. A single stiff or obscure line would outweigh a whole book of solemn grandeur in the mere flip-pant encounter of the wits, and, in general, the truth and justice of the cause you espouse is rather an

encumbrance than an assistance ; or it is like heavy armour which few have strength to wield. Anything short of complete triumph on the right side is defeat : any hole picked or flaw detected in an argument which we are holding earnestly and conscientiously, is sufficient to raise the laugh against us. This is the greatest advantage which folly and knavery have. We are not satisfied to be right, unless we can prove others to be quite wrong ; and as all the world would be thought to have some reason on their side, they are glad of any loophole or pretext to escape from the dogmatism and tyranny we would set up over them. Absolute submission requires absolute proofs. Without some such drawback, the world might become too wise and too good, at least according to every man's private prescription. In this sense *ridicule is the test of truth* ; that is, the levity and indifference on one side balances the formality and presumption on the other.

N.—Horne Tooke used to play with his antagonists in the way you speak of. He constantly threw Fuseli into a rage, and made him a laughing-stock, by asking him to explain the commonest things, and often what Fuseli understood much better than he did. But in general, I think it is less an indifference to truth than the fear of finding yourself in the wrong, that carries you through when you take up any opinion from caprice or the spirit of contradiction. Danger almost always produces courage and presence of mind. The faculties are called forth with the occasion. You see

men of very ordinary characters, placed in extraordinary circumstances act like men of capacity. The late King of France was thought weak and imbecile, till he was thrown into the most trying situations; and then he showed sense and even eloquence which no one had ever suspected. Events supplied the want of genius and energy; the external impressions were so strong, that the dullest or most indolent must have been roused by them.

Indeed the wise man is perhaps more liable to err in such extreme cases by setting up his own preconceptions and self-will against circumstances, than the *commonplace* character who yields to necessity and is passive under existing exigencies. It is this which makes kings and ministers equal to their situations. They may be very poor creatures in themselves; but the importance of the part they have to act and the magnitude of their responsibility inspire them with a factitious and *official* elevation of view. Few people are found totally unfit for high station, and it is lucky that it is so.

Perhaps men of genius and imagination are the least adapted to get into the state go-cart; Buona-parte, we see, with all his talent, only drove to the devil. When Richard II. was quite a youth and he went to suppress the rebellion of Wat Tyler in Smithfield, and the latter was killed, his followers drew their bows and were about to take vengeance on the young king, when he stepped forward and said that

“now as their leader was dead, he would be their leader.” This instantly disarmed their rage, and they received him with acclamations. He had no other course left; the peril he was in made him see his place of safety. Courage has a wonderful effect: this makes mad people so terrible, that they have no fear. Even wild beasts or a mob (which is much the same thing) will hardly dare to attack you if you show no fear of them.

I have heard Lord Exmouth (Sir Edward Pellew) say that once when he was out with his ship at sea and there was a mutiny on board and no chance of escape, he learned (from a spy he had among them) the moment when the ringleaders were assembled and about to execute their design of putting the captain and all the officers to death, when taking a pistol in each hand, he went down into the cock-pit into the midst of them; and threatening to shoot the first man that stirred, took them every one prisoners. If he had betrayed the least fear or any of them had raised a hand, he must have been instantly sacrificed. But he was bolder than any individual in the group, and by this circumstance had the ascendancy over the whole put together. A similar act of courage is related of Peter the Great, who singly entered the haunt of some conspirators, and striking down the leader with a blow on the face, spread consternation amongst the assassins, who were terrified by his fearlessness.

(*A book of prints was brought in, containing Views of Edinburgh.*)

N.—It is curious to what perfection these things are brought, and how cheap they are. It is that which makes them sell and ensures the fortune of those who publish them. Great fortunes are made out of small profits, which allow all the world to become purchasers. That is the reason the Colosseum will hardly answer. There never was an example of an exhibition in England answering at a crown a piece. People look twice at their money before they will part with it, if it be more than they are accustomed to pay. It becomes a question, and perhaps a few stragglers go; whereas they ought to go in a stream and as a matter of course. If people have to pay a little more than usual, though a mere trifle, they consider it in the light of an imposition, and resent it as such; if the price be a little under the mark, they think they have saved so much money, and snap at it as a bargain.

The publishers of the work on Edinburgh are the same who brought out the *Views of London*; and it is said, the success of that undertaking enabled them to buy up Lackington's business. E——¹ the architect, I am told, suggested the plan, but declined a share that was offered him in it, because he said nothing that he had been engaged in

¹ The reference is probably to James Elmes, who about this time was largely engaged in artistic literature. [ED.]

had ever succeeded. The event would not belie the notion of his own ill luck. It is singular on what slight turns good or ill fortune depends. Lackington (I understood from the person who brought the *Edinburgh Views* here) died worth near half a million: nobody could tell how he had made it. At thirty he was not worth a shilling. The great difficulty is in the first hundred pounds.

H.—It is sympathy with the mass of mankind, and finding out from yourself what it is they want and must have.

N.—It seems a good deal owing to the most minute circumstances. A difference of sixpence in the price will make all the difference in the sale of a book. Sometimes a work lies on the shelf for a time, and then runs like wild-fire. There was *Drelincourt on Death*, which is a fortune in itself; it hung on hand; *nobody* read it, till Defoe put a ghost-story into it, and it has been a stock-book ever since. It is the same in prints. A catching subject or name will make one thing a universal favourite, while another of ten times the merit is never noticed. I have known this happen to myself in more than one instance.

This is the provoking part in W[estall] and some other painters, who, taking advantage of the externals and accidents of their art, have run away with nearly all the popularity of their time. Jack T—— was here the other day to say that W[estall] and his friends complained bitterly of the

things I said about him. I replied that I had only spoken of him as an artist, which I was at liberty to do ; and that if he were offended, I would recommend to him to read the story of Charles II. and the Duchess of Cleveland, who came to the king with a complaint, that whenever she met Nell Gwyn in the street, the latter put her head out of the coach and made mouths at her. "Well then," says Charles II. "the next time you meet Nelly and she repeats the offence, do you make mouths at her again !" So if Mr. W[estall] is hurt at my saying things of him, all he has to do is to say things of me in return.

H.—I confess, I never liked W[estall]. It was one of the errors of my youth that I did not think him equal to Raphael and Rubens united, as Payne Knight contended ; and I have fought many a battle with numbers (if not odds) against me on that point.

N.—Then you must have the satisfaction of seeing a change of opinion at present.

H.—Pardon me, I have not that satisfaction ; I have only a double annoyance from it. It is no consolation to me that an individual was over-rated by the folly of the public formerly, and that he suffers from their injustice and fickleness at present. It is no satisfaction to me that poor I[rrving] is reduced to his primitive congregation, and that the stream of coronet-coaches no longer rolls down Holborn or Oxford Street to his chapel. They ought never to have done so, or they ought to continue to do so. The world (whatever in their petulance and profligacy

they may think) have no right to intoxicate poor human nature with the full tide of popular applause, and then to drive it to despair for the want of it.

There are no words to express the cruelty, the weakness, the shamelessness of such conduct, which resembles that of the little girl who dresses up her doll in the most extravagant finery, and then in mere wantonness strips it naked to its wool and bits of wood again—with this difference that the doll has no feeling, whereas the world's idols are wholly sensitive.

(Of some one who preferred appearances to realities.)

N.—I can understand the character, because it is exactly the reverse of what I should do and feel. It is like dressing out of one's sphere, or any other species of affectation and imposture. I cannot bear to be taken for anything but what I am. It is like what the country-people call "having a *halfpenny head and a farthing tail*." That is what makes me mad when people sometimes come and pay their court to me by saying, "Bless me! how sagacious you look! What a penetrating countenance!" No, I say, that is but the title-page—what is there in the book? Your dwelling so much on the exterior seems to imply that the inside does not correspond to it. Don't let me look wise and be foolish, but let me be wise though I am taken for a fool! Anything else is quackery: it is as if there was no real excellence in the world, but in opinion.

I used to blame Sir Joshua for this: he sometimes wanted to get *Collins's earth*, but did not like to have it known. Then there were certain oils that he made a great *fuss* and mystery about. I have said to myself, surely there is something deeper and nobler in the art that does not depend on all this trick and handicraft. Give Titian and a common painter the same materials and tools to work with, and then see the difference between them. This is all that is worth contending for. If Sir Joshua had had no other advantage than the using *Collins's earth* and some particular sort of *megilp*, we should not now have been talking about him.

When W—— was here the other day, he asked about Mengs and his school; and when I told him what I thought, he said, "Is that your own opinion, or did you take it from Sir Joshua?" I answered, that if I admired Sir Joshua, it was because there was something congenial in our tastes, and not because I was his pupil. I saw his faults, and differed with him often enough. If I have any bias, it is the other way, to take fancies into my head and run into singularity and cavils. In what I said to you about Ramsay's picture of the Queen, for instance, I don't know that any one ever thought so before, or that any one else would agree with me. It might be set down as mere whim and caprice; but I can't help it, if it is so. All I know is, that such is my feeling about it, which I can no more part with than I can part with my own existence.

It is the same in other things, as in music. There was an awkward composer at the Opera many years ago, of the name of Boccarelli ; what he did was stupid enough in general, but I remember he sang an air one day at Cosway's, which they said Shield had transferred into the *Fritch of Bacon*. I cannot describe the effect it had upon me—it seemed as if it wound into my very soul—I would give anything to hear it sung again. So I could have listened to Dignum's singing the lines out of Shakspeare—"Come unto these yellow sands, and then take hands"—a hundred times over. But I am not sure that others would be affected in the same manner by it : there may be some quaint association of ideas in the case. But at least, if I am wrong, the folly is my own.

H.—There is no danger of the sort, except from affectation, which I am sure is not your case. All the real taste and feeling in the world is made up of what people *take in their heads* in this manner. Even if you were right only once in five times in these hazardous experiments and shrewd guesses, that would be a fifth part of the truth ; whereas, if you merely repeated after others by rote or waited to have all the world on your side, there could be absolutely nothing gained at all. If any one had come in and had expressed the same idea of Ramsay's portrait of the Queen, this would doubtless be a confirmation of your opinion, like two persons finding out a likeness ; but suppose W—— had gone away with your opinion in his pocket, and had spread it

about everywhere what a fine painter Ramsay was, I do not see how this would have strengthened your conclusion ; nay, perhaps the people whom he got as converts would entirely mistake the meaning, and come to you with the very reverse of what you had said as a prodigious discovery. This is the way in which these unanimous verdicts are commonly obtained. You might say that Ramsay was not a fine painter, but a man of real genius. The world, not comprehending the distinction, would merely come to the gross conclusion, that he was both one and the other. Thus even truth is vulgarly debased into *commonplace* and nonsense. So that it is not simply as Mr. Locke observed, "That there are not so many wrong opinions in the world as is generally imagined, for most people have no opinion at all, but take up with those of others or with mere hearsay and echoes ;" but these echoes are often false ones and no more like the original idea than the rhyming echoes in *Hudibras* or than Slender's Mum and Budget.

N.—But don't you think the contrary extreme would be just as bad, if every one set up to judge for himself and every question was split into an endless variety of opinions ?

H.—I do not see that this would follow. If persons who are sincere and free to inquire differ widely on any subject, it is because it is beyond their reach, and there is no satisfactory evidence one way or the other. Supposing a thing to be doubtful, why

should it not be left so? But men's passions and interests, when brought into play, are most tenacious on those points where their understandings afford them least light. Those doctrines are *established* which need propping up, as men place beams against falling houses. It does not require an act of Parliament to persuade mathematicians to agree with Euclid, or painters to admire Raphael.

N.—And don't you think this the best rule for the rest of the world to go by?

H.—Yes; but not if the doctors themselves differed: then it would be necessary to *clench the nail* with a few smart strokes of bigotry and intolerance. What admits of proof, men agree in, if they have no interest to the contrary; what they differ about in spite of all that can be said, is matter of taste or conjecture.

CONVERSATION THE EIGHTEENTH

N.—OPIE, I remember, used to argue, that there were as many different sorts of taste as genius. He said, “If I am engaged in a picture, and endeavour to do it according to the suggestions of my employers, I do not understand exactly what they want, nor they what I can do, and I please no one: but if I do it according to my own notions, I belong to a class, and if I am able to satisfy myself, I please that class.”

You did not know Opie?¹ You would have admired him greatly. I do not speak of him as an artist, but as a man of sense and observation. He paid me the compliment of saying, “that we should have been the best friends in the world, if we had not been rivals.” I think he had more of this feeling than I had; perhaps, because I had most vanity. We sometimes got into foolish altercations. I recollect once in particular, at a banker’s in the City, we took up the whole of dinner-time with a ridiculous controversy about Milton and Shakspeare; I am sure we neither

¹ But Hazlitt does seem to have had a slight acquaintance with Opie. [ED.]

of us had the least notion which was right—and when I was heartily ashamed of it, a foolish citizen who was present, added to my confusion by saying, “Lord! what would I give to hear two such men as you talk every day!” This quite humbled me: I was ready to sink with vexation: I could have resolved never to open my mouth again. But I can’t help thinking W—— was wrong in supposing I borrow everything from others. It is not my character. I never could learn my lesson at school. My copy was hardly legible; but if there was a prize to be obtained or my father was to see it, then I could write a very fine hand with all the usual flourishes. What I know of history (and something about heraldry) has been gathered up when I had to inquire into the subject for a picture: if it had been set me as a task, I should have forgotten it immediately.

In the same way, when Boydell came and proposed a subject for a picture to me, and pointed out the capabilities, I always said I could make nothing of it: but as soon as he was gone and I was left to myself, the whole then seemed to unfold itself naturally. I never could study the rules of composition or make sketches and drawings beforehand; in this, probably running into the opposite error to that of the modern Italian painters, whom Fuseli reproaches with spending their whole lives in preparation. I must begin at once or I can do nothing. When I set about the “Wat Tyler,” I was frightened at it: it was the largest work

I had ever undertaken : there were to be horses and armour and buildings and several groups in it : when I looked at it, the canvas seemed ready to fall upon me. But I had committed myself and could not escape ; disgrace was behind me—and every step I made in advance was so much positively gained. If I had stayed to make a number of designs and try different experiments, I never should have had the courage to go on. Half the things that people do not succeed in, are through fear of making the attempt. Like the recruit in Farquhar's comedy, you grow wondrous bold, when you have once taken "list-money." When you *must* do a thing, you feel in some measure that you *can* do it. You have only to commit yourself beyond retreat. It is like the soldier going into battle or a player first appearing on the stage—the worst is over when they arrive upon the scene of action.

H.—I found nearly the same thing that you describe when I first began to write for the newspapers. I had not till then been in the habit of writing at all, or had been a long time about it ; but I perceived that with the necessity, the fluency came. Something I did, *took* ; and I was called upon to do a number of things all at once. I was in the middle of the stream, and must sink or swim. I had, for instance, often a theatrical criticism to write after midnight, which appeared the next morning. There was no fault found with it—at least, it was as good as if I had had to do it for a weekly paper. I only did it at once,

and recollected all I had to say on the spot, because I could not put it off for three days, when perhaps I should have forgotten the best part of it. Besides, when one is pressed for time, one saves it. I might set down nearly all I had to say in my mind, while the play was going on. I know I did not feel at a loss for matter—the difficulty was to compress and write it out fast enough. When you are tied to time, you can come to time.

I conceive in like manner more wonder is expressed at extempore speaking than it is entitled to. Not to mention that the same well-known topics continually recur, and that the speakers may con their extempore speeches over beforehand and merely watch their opportunity to slide them in dexterously into the grand procession of the debate: a man when once on his legs *must say something*, and this is the utmost that a public speaker generally says. If he has anything good to say, he can recollect it just as well at once as in a week's literary leisure, as well standing up as sitting down, except from habit. We are not surprised at a man's telling us his thoughts across a table: why should we be so at his doing the same thing, when mounted on one? But he excites more attention: *that* gives him a double motive. A man's getting up to make a speech in public will not give him a command of words or thoughts if he is without them; but he may be delivered of all the brilliancy or wisdom he actually possesses, in a longer or a shorter space, according

to the occasion. The circumstance of the time is optional; necessity, if it be not the mother of invention, supplies us with the memory of all we know.

N.—(*after a pause*)—There is no end of the bigotry and prejudice in the world; one can only shrug one's shoulders and submit to it. Have you seen the copies they have got down at the club-house in Pall Mall of the groups of horses from the Elgin Marbles? Lord! how inferior they are to Rubens's! So stiff, and poor, and dry, compared to his magnificent spirit and bold luxuriance! I should not know them to be horses; they are as much like anything else. I was at Somerset House the other day. They talk of the Dutch painters; why, there are pictures there of interiors and other subjects of familiar life, that throw all the boasted *chefs-d'œuvre* of the Dutch school to an immeasurable distance. I do not speak of history, which has not been fairly tried; but in all for which there has been encouragement, no nation can go beyond us. We have resources and a richness of capacity equal to any undertaking.

H.—Do you recollect any in particular that you admired at the Exhibition?

N.—No, I do not remember the names; but it was a general sense of excellence and truth of imitation of natural objects. As to lofty history, our religion scarcely allows it. The Italians had no more genius for painting nor a greater love of pictures than we; but the *Church* was the foster-mother of the

fine arts ; being the most politic and powerful establishment in the world, they laid their hands on all that could allure and impress the minds of the people—music, painting, architecture, ceremonies ; and this produced a succession of great artists and noble works, till the churches were filled, and then they ceased. The genius of Italian art was nothing but the genius of Popery. God forbid we should purchase success at the same price ! Everything at Rome is like a picture—is calculated for show. I remember walking through one of the by-streets near the Vatican, where I met some procession in which the Pope was ; and all at once I saw a number of the most beautiful Arabian horses curveting and throwing out their long tails, like a vision or a part of a romance. We should here get one or two at most.

All our holiday pageants, even the Coronation, are low Bartlemy-fair exhibitions compared with what you see at Rome. And then to see the Pope give the benediction at St. Peter's, raising himself up and spreading out his hands in the form of a cross, with an energy and dignity as if he was giving a blessing to the whole world ! No, it is not enough to *see* Popery in order to hate it—it must be felt too. A poor man going through one of the narrow streets where a similar procession was passing, was fiercely attacked by a soldier of the Swiss Guards, and ordered to stand back. The man said he could retire no farther, for he was close against the wall. “Get back, you and

the wall too!" was the answer of haughty servility and mild despotism. It is this spirit peeping out that makes one dread the fairest outside appearances; and with this spirit, and the power and determination it implies to delude and lead the multitude blindfold with every lure to their imagination and their senses, I will answer for the production of finer historical and Scripture-pieces in this country (let us be as far north as we will) than we have yet seen.

H.—You do not think, then, that we are naturally a dry, sour, Protestant set? Is not the air of Ireland Popish, and that of Scotland Presbyterian?

N.—No: though you may have it so if you please. K—— has been wanting my two copies of ——, though I do not think he will bid high enough to induce me to part with them. I am in this respect like Opie, who had an original by Sir Joshua that he much valued, and he used to say, "I don't know what I should do in that case, but I hope to God nobody will offer me £500 for it!" It is curious, this very picture sold for £500 the other day. So it is that real merit creeps on, and is sure to find its level. The "Holy Family" sold among Lord Gwydir's pictures for £1900.

H.—Is that fine?

N.—Oh yes! it's certainly fine. It wants the air of history, but it has a rich colour and great simplicity and innocence. It is not equal to the "Snake in the Grass," which Mr. Peel gave 1600 guineas for. That was his *forte*: nothing is wanting there.

A Stranger.—I thought Sir Joshua's colours did not stand?

N.—That is true of some of them: he tried experiments, and had no knowledge of chemistry, and bought colours of Jews: but I speak of them as they came from the easel. As he left them and intended them to be, no pictures in the world would stand by the side of them. Colour seemed to exist substantively in his mind. You see this still in those that have not faded—in his later works especially, which were also his best; and this, with character, and a certain sweetness, must always make his works invaluable. You come to this at last—what you find in any one that you can get nowhere else. If you have this about you, you need not be afraid of time.

Gainsborough had the saving grace of originality; and you cannot put him down for that reason. With all their faults, and the evident want of an early study and knowledge of the art, his pictures fetch more every time they are brought to the hammer. I don't know what it was that his "View of the Mall in St. James's Park" sold for not long ago. I remember Mr. P[rince] H[oare] coming to me, and saying what an exquisite picture Gainsborough had painted of the Park. You would suppose it would be stiff and formal with the straight rows of trees and people sitting on benches—it is all in motion, and in a flutter like a lady's fan. Watteau is not half so airy. His picture of young Lord —— was a masterpiece—there was such a look

of natural gentility. You must recollect his "Girl feeding pigs": the expression and truth of nature were never surpassed. Sir Joshua was struck with it, though he said he ought to have made her a beauty.

H.—Perhaps it was as well to make sure of one thing at a time. I remember being once driven by a shower of rain for shelter into a picture dealer's shop in Oxford Street, where there stood on the floor a copy of Gainsborough's "Shepherd-boy" with the thunderstorm coming ^fon. What a truth and beauty was there! He stands with his hands clasped, looking up with a mixture of timidity and resignation, eyeing a magpie chattering over his head, while the wind is rustling in the branches. It was like a vision breathed on the canvas. I have been fond of Gainsborough ever since.

N.—Oh! that was an essence: but it was only a copy you saw? The picture was finer than his "Woodman," which has a little false glitter and attempt at theatrical effect; but the other is innocence itself. Gainsborough was a natural gentleman; and with all his simplicity he had wit too. An eminent counsellor once attempted to puzzle him on some trial about the originality of a picture by saying, "I observe you lay great stress on the phrase, the *painter's eye*; what do you mean by that?"—"The painter's eye," answered Gainsborough, "is to him what the lawyer's tongue is to you." Sir Joshua was not fond of Wilson, and said at one of the Academy dinners,

“Yes, Gainsborough is certainly the best landscape-painter of the day.”—“No,” replied Wilson, who overheard him, “but he is the best portrait-painter.” This was a sufficient testimony in Gainsborough’s favour.

H.—He did not make himself agreeable at Buckingham House, any more than Sir Joshua, who kept a certain distance and wished to appear as a gentleman ; they wanted a *buffoon* whom they might be familiar with at first, and insult the moment he overstepped the mark, or as soon as they grew tired of him. Their favourites must be like *pet* lapdogs or monkeys.

N.—C——¹ went to court the other day after a long absence. He was very graciously received, notwithstanding. The K[ing] held out his hand for him to kiss ; he recollected himself in time to perceive the object. He was struck with the manner in which the great people looked towards the King, and the utter insignificance of everything else ; “and then,” said C——, “as soon as they are out of the palace, they get into their carriages, and ride over you with all the fierceness and insolence imaginable.” West used to say you could tell the highest nobility at court by their being the most abject. This was policy, for the most powerful would be most apt to excite jealousy in the sovereign ;

¹ Probably Augustus W. Calcott, R. A., the landscape-painter, who was at all times a favourite at Court, and who shortly after this date was knighted and put in charge of the Royal pictures. [ED.]

and by showing an extreme respect, they thought to prevent the possibility of encroachment or insult.

Garrick complained that when he went to read before the court, not a look or a murmur testified approbation; there was a profound stillness—every one only watched to see what the King thought. It was like reading to a set of wax-work figures: he who had been accustomed to the applause of thousands, could not bear this assembly of mutes. Marchant went to the late King about a cameo, who was offended at his saying the face must be done in full and not as a profile; “then,” said the patron, “I’ll get somebody else to do it.” Coming out at the door, one of the pages asked the artist, “Why do you contradict the K[ing]? He is not used to be contradicted!” This is intelligible in an absolute despotism, where the will of the sovereign is law, and where he can cut off your head if he pleases; but is it not strange in a free country?

H.—It is placing an ordinary mortal on the top of a pyramid, and kneeling at the bottom of it to the “highest and mightiest.” It is a trick of human reason surpassing the grossness of the brute.

CONVERSATION THE NINETEENTH

H.—FASHION is gentility running away from vulgarity, and afraid of being overtaken by it. It is a sign the two things are not very far asunder.

N.—Yes; Mr. —— used to say, that just before the women in his time left off hoops, they looked like bats. Going on from one affectation to another, they at last wore them close under their arms, so that they resembled wings growing out from their shoulders; and having reached the top of the absurdity, they then threw them aside all at once. If long waists are the fashion one season, they are exploded the next; as soon as the court adopts any particular mode, the city follows the example, and as soon as the city takes it up, the court lays it down. The whole is caricature and masquerade. *Nature only is left out*; for that is either common, or what is fine in it would not always be found on the fashionable side of the question. It may be the fashion to paint or not to paint; but if it were the fashion to have a fine complexion, many fashionable people must go

without one, and many unfashionable ones would be at the height of it. Deformity is as often the fashion as beauty, yet the world in general see no other beauty than fashion, and their vanity or interest or complaisance bribes their understanding to disbelieve even their senses. If cleanliness is the fashion, then cleanliness is admired; if dirt, hair-powder, and pomatum are the fashion, then dirt, hair-powder, and pomatum are admired just as much, if not more, from their being disagreeable.

H.—The secret is, that fashion is imitating in certain things that are in our power and that are nearly indifferent in themselves, those who possess certain other advantages that are not in our power, and which the possessors are as little disposed to part with as they are eager to obtrude them upon the notice of others by every external symbol at their immediate control. We think the cut of a coat fine, because it is worn by a man with ten thousand a year, with a fine house, and a fine carriage: as we cannot get the ten thousand a year, the house, or the carriage, we get what we can—the cut of the fine gentleman's coat, and thus are in the fashion. But as we get it, he gets rid of it, which shows that he cares nothing about it; but he keeps his ten thousand a year, his fine house, and his fine carriage. A rich man wears gold buckles to show that he is rich: a coxcomb gets gilt ones to look like the rich man, and as soon as the gold ones prove nothing, the rich man leaves them off.

So it is with all the real advantages that fashionable people possess. Say that they have more grace, good manners, and refinement than the rabble; but these do not change every moment at the nod of fashion. Speaking correctly is not proper to one class more than another: if the fashionable, to distinguish themselves from the vulgar, affect a peculiar tone or set of phrases, this is mere *slang*. The difference between grace and awkwardness is the same one year after another. This is the meaning of *natural politeness*. It is a perception of and attention to the feelings of others, which is the same thing, whether it is neglected by the Great or practised by the vulgar. The barrier between refinement and grossness cannot be arbitrarily effaced. Nothing changes but what depends on the shallow affectation and assumption of superiority: real excellence can never become vulgar. So Pope says in his elegant way—

“Virtue may choose the high or low degree,
'Tis just the same to virtue and to me;
Dwell in a monk or light upon a king,
She's still the same belov'd, contented thing.
Vice is undone if she forgets her birth,
And stoops from angels to the dregs of earth.”

Pope's verse is not admired, because it was once the fashion: it will be admired, let the fashion change how it will.

N.—When Sir Joshua Reynolds wanted to learn what real grace was, he studied it in the attitudes of

children, not in the school of the dancing-master, or in the empty strut or mawkish languor of fashion. A young painter asked me the other day whether I thought that Guido was not chargeable with affectation? I told him that I thought *not*, or in a very trifling degree. I could not deny that Guido sometimes bordered on and reminded me of it; or that there was that which in anybody else might be really so, but that in him it seemed only an extreme natural gentility. He puts his figures into attitudes that are a little too courtly and studied, but he probably could not help it.

H.—It was rather the excess of a quality or feeling in his mind, than the aiming to supply the defect of one.

N.—Yes; there is no suspicion of what he is doing. The odious part of affectation is when there is an evident design to impose on you with counterfeit pretensions. So in another point that might be objected to him, the impropriety of his naked figures, no mortal can steer clearer of it than he does. They may be strictly said to be clothed with their own delicacy and beauty. There is the “Venus attired by the Graces”: what other painter durst attempt it? They are to be all beauties, all naked; yet he has escaped as if by miracle—none but the most vicious can find fault with it—the very beauty, elegance, and grace keep down instead of exciting improper ideas. And then again, the “Andromeda chained to the rock”—both are, I believe, in the drawing-room at

Windsor : but there is no possible offence to be taken at them, nothing to shock the most timid or innocent, because there was no particle of grossness in the painter's mind. I have seen pictures by others muffled up to the chin, that had twenty times as much vice in them. It is wonderful how the cause is seen in the effect. So we find it in Richardson. *Clarissa* is a story in the midst of temptation ; but he comes clear and triumphant out of that ordeal, because his own imagination is not contaminated by it. If there had been the least hint of an immoral tendency, the slightest indication of a wish to inflame the passions, it would have been all over with him. The intention always will peep out—you do not communicate a disease if you are not infected with it yourself. Albano's nymphs and goddesses seem waiting for admirers : Guido's are protected with a veil of innocence and modesty. Titian would have given them an air of Venetian courtesans : Raphael would have made them look something more than mortal : neither would have done what Guido has effected, who has conquered the difficulty by the pure force of feminine softness and delicacy.

H.—I am glad to hear you speak so of Guido. I was beginning, before I went abroad, to have a “sneaking contempt” for him as insipid and monotonous, from seeing the same everlasting repetitions of Cleopatras and Madonnas ; but I returned a convert to his merits. I saw many indifferent pictures attributed to great masters ; but wherever I saw a

Guido, I found elegance and beauty that answered to the "silver" sound of his name. The mind lives on a round of names; and it is a great point gained not to have one of these snatched from us by a sight of their works. As to the display of the naked figure in works of art, the case to me seems clear: it is only when there is nothing but the naked figure that it is offensive. In proportion as the beauty or perfection of the imitation rises, the indecency vanishes. You look at it then with an eye to art, just as the anatomist examines the human figure with a view to science. Other ideas are introduced. J. —, of Edinburgh, had a large, sprawling Danae hanging over the chimney-piece of his office, where he received Scotch parsons and their wives on law-business: he thought it a triumph over Presbyterian prudery and prejudice, and a sort of chivalrous answer to the imputed barbarism of the North. It was certainly a paradox in taste, a breach of manners. He asked me if I objected to it because it was naked? "No," I said, "but because it is ugly: you can only have put it there because it is naked, and that alone shows a felonious intent. Had there been either beauty or expression, it would have *conducted off* the objectionable part. As it is, I don't see how you can answer it to the kirk-sessions."

N.—I remember Sir W. W——¹ employed Sir Joshua and Dance, who was a very eminent designer, to ornament a music-room which he had built. Sir

¹ Perhaps Sir Williams Wynn. [ED.]

Joshua on this occasion painted his St. Cecilia, which he made very fine at first, but afterwards spoiled it; and Dance chose the subject of Orpheus. When I asked Miss Reynolds what she thought of it, she said she had no doubt of its being clever and well done, but that it looked "like a naked man." This answer was conclusive against it; for if the inspiration of the character had been given, you would have overlooked the want of clothes. The nakedness only strikes and offends the eye in the barrenness of other matter. It is the same in the drama. Mere grossness or ribaldry is intolerable; but you often find in the old comedy that the wit and ingenuity (as well as custom) carry off what otherwise could not be borne. The laughter prevents the blush. So an expression seems gross in one person's mouth, which in another passes off with perfect innocence. The reason is, there is something in the manner that gives a quite different construction to what is said. Have you seen the *Alcides*, the two foreigners who perform such prodigious feats of strength at the theatre, but with very little clothing on? They say the people hardly know what to make of it. They should not be too sure that this is any proof of their taste or virtue.

H.—I recollect a remark of Coleridge's on the conclusion of the story of *Paul and Virginia* by Bernardin St. Pierre. Just before the shipwreck, and when nothing else can save the heroine from perishing, an athletic figure comes forward stripped, but with perfect respect, and offers to swim with her to the

shore ; but instead of accepting his proposal, she turns away with affected alarm. This, Coleridge said, was a proof of the prevailing tone of French depravity, and not of virgin innocence. A really modest girl in such circumstances would not have thought of any scruple.

N.—It is the want of imagination or of an insight into nature in ordinary writers ; they do not know how to place themselves in the situations they describe. Whatever feeling or passion is uppermost, fills the mind and drives out every other. If you were confined in a vault, and thought you saw a ghost, you would rush out, though a lion was at the entrance. On the other hand, if you were pursued by a lion, you would take refuge in a charnel-house, though it was full of spirits, and would disregard the dead bones and putrid relics about you. Both passions may be equally strong ; the question is, which is roused first. But it is few who can get to the fountain-head, the secret springs of Nature. Shakspeare did it always ; and Sir Walter Scott frequently. G[odwin] says he always was pleased with my conversation before you broached that opinion ; but I do not see how that can be, for he always contradicts and thwarts me. When two people are constantly crossing one another on the road, they cannot be very good company. You agree to what I say, and often explain or add to it, which encourages me to go on.

H.—I believe G[odwin] is sincere in what he says, for he has frequently expressed the same opinion to me.

N.—That might be so, though he took great care not to let me know it. People would often more willingly speak well of you behind your back than to your face; they are afraid either of shocking your modesty or gratifying your vanity. That was the case with ——. If he ever was struck with anything I did, he made a point not to let me see it: he treated it lightly, and said it was very well.

H.—I do not think G[odwin]'s differing with you was any proof of his opinion. Like most authors, he has something of the schoolmaster about him, and wishes to keep up an air of authority. What you say may be very well for a learner; but he is the oracle. You must not set up for yourself; and to keep you in due subordination, he catechises and contradicts from mere habit.

N.—Human nature is always the same. It was so with Johnson and Goldsmith. They would allow no one to have any merit but themselves. The very attempt was a piece of presumption, and a trespass upon their privileged rights. I remember a poem that came out, and that was sent to Sir Joshua: his servant, Ralph, had instructions to bring it in just after dinner. Goldsmith presently got hold of it, and seemed thrown into a rage before he had read a line of it. He then said, "What wretched stuff is here! what cursed nonsense that is!" and kept all the while marking the passages with his thumb-nail, as if he would cut them in pieces. At last, Sir Joshua, who was provoked, interfered, and said,

“Nay, don’t spoil my book, however.” Dr. Johnson looked down on the rest of the world as pigmies ; he smiled at the very idea that any one should set up for a fine writer but himself. They never admitted C[olman] as one of the set ; Sir Joshua did not invite him to dinner. If he had been in the room, Goldsmith would have flown out of it as if a dragon had been there. I remember Garrick once saying, “Damn his *dish-clout* face ; his plays would never do if it were not for my patching them up and acting in them.” Another time, he took a poem of C[olman]’s, and read it backwards to turn it into ridicule. Yet some of his pieces keep possession of the stage, so that there must be something in them.

H.—Perhaps he was later than they, and they considered him as an interloper on that account.

N.—No ; there was a prejudice against him : he did not somehow fall into the train. It was the same with Vanbrugh in Pope’s time. They made a jest of him, and endeavoured to annoy him in every possible way ; he was a *black sheep* for no reason in the world, except that he was cleverer than they ; that is, could build houses and write verses at the same time. They laughed at his architecture ; yet it is certain that it is quite original, and at least a question whether it is not beautiful as well as new. He was the first who sank the window-frames within the walls of houses—they projected before : he did it as a beauty, but it has been since adopted by Act of Parliament to prevent fire. Some gentleman was

asking me about the imposing style of architecture with which Vanbrugh had decorated the top of Blenheim House ; he had mistaken the chimneys for an order of architecture, so that what is an eye-sore in all other buildings, Vanbrugh has had the art to convert into an ornament. And then his wit ! Think what a comedy is the *Provoked Husband* ! What a scope and comprehension in the display of manners from the highest to the lowest ! It was easier to write an epigram on "Brother Van" than such a play as this. I once asked Richards, the scene-painter, who was perfectly used to the stage, and acquainted with all the actors, what he considered as the best play in the language ? And he answered, without hesitation, *The Journey to London*.

H.—*Lord Foppington* is also his, if he wanted *supporters*. He was in the same situation as Rousseau with respect to the wits of his time, who traces all his misfortunes and the jealousy that pursued him through life to the success of the *Devin du Village*. He said Diderot and the rest could have forgiven his popularity as an author, but they could not bear his writing an opera.

N.—If you belong to a set, you must either lead or follow ; you cannot maintain your independence. Beattie did very well with the great folks in my time, because he looked up to them, and he excited no uneasy sense of competition. Indeed, he managed so well that Sir Joshua flattered him and his book in return in the most effectual manner. In his allegorical

portrait of the doctor, he introduced the angel of truth chasing away the demons of falsehood and impiety, who bore an obvious resemblance to Hume and Voltaire. This brought out Goldsmith's fine reproof of his friend, who said that "Sir Joshua might be ashamed of debasing a genius like Voltaire before a man like Beattie, whose works would be forgotten in a few years, while Voltaire's fame would last for ever!" Sir J. R. took the design of this picture from one of a similar subject by Tintoret, now in the Royal Collection in Kensington Palace. He said he had no intention of the sort: Hume was a broad-backed clumsy figure, not very like; but I know he meant Voltaire, for I saw a French medal of him lying about in the room.

Mrs. Beattie also came up with her husband to London. I recollect her asking for "a little *paurter*," in her broad Scotch way. It is like Cibber's seeing Queen Anne at Nottingham when he was a boy, and all he could remember about her was her asking him to give her "a glass of wine and water." She was an ordinary character, and belonged to the class of good sort of people. So the Margravine of Baireuth describes the Duchess of Kendal, who was mistress to George I., to be a quiet inoffensive character, who would do neither good nor harm to anybody.

Did you ever read her *Memoirs*? Lord! what an account she gives of the state of manners at the old court of Prussia, and of the brutal despot-

ism and cruelty of the king! She was his daughter, and he used to strike her, and drag her by the hair of her head, and leave her with her face bleeding, and often senseless, on the floor for the smallest trifles; and he treated her brother, afterwards Frederick II. (and to whom she was much attached), no better. That might in part account for the hardness of his character at a later period.

H.—I suppose Prussia was at that time a mere petty state or sort of by-court, so that what they did was pretty much done in a corner, and they were not afraid of being talked of by the rest of Europe.

N.—No; it was quite an absolute monarchy with all the pomp and pretensions of sovereignty. Frederick (the father) was going, on some occasion when he was displeased with him, to strike our ambassador; but this conduct was resented and put a stop to. The Queen (sister to George II. and who was imprisoned so long on a suspicion of conjugal infidelity) appears to have been a violent-spirited woman, and also weak. George I. could never learn to speak English, and his successor, George II., spoke it badly, and neither ever felt themselves at home in this country; and they were always going over to Hanover, where they found themselves lords and masters, while here, though they had been raised so much higher, their dignity never sat easy upon them. They did not know what to make of their new situation.

[Northcote here read me a letter I had heard him

speak of relative to a distinguished character mentioned in a former Conversation.]

“ A Letter to Mr. Northcote in London from his Brother at Plymouth, giving an account of a Shipwreck.

“ Plymouth, Jan. 28, 1796.

“ We have had a terrible succession of stormy weather of late. Tuesday, immediately after dinner, I went to the Hoe to see the Dutton East Indiaman, full of troops, upon the rocks, directly under the flag-staff of the citadel. She had been out seven weeks on her passage to the West Indies as a transport, with 400 troops on board, besides women and the ship's crew; and had been just driven back by distress of weather, with a great number of sick on board. You cannot conceive anything so horrible as the appearance of things altogether, which I beheld when I first arrived on the spot. The ship was stuck on sunken rocks, somewhat inclining to one side, and without a mast or the bowsprit standing; and her decks covered with the soldiers as thick as they could possibly stand by one another, with the sea breaking in a most horrible manner all around them; and what still added to the melancholy grandeur of the scene was the distress-guns which were fired now and then directly over our head from the Citadel.

“ When I first came to the spot, I found that they had by some means got a rope with one end of it fixed to the ship, and the other was held by the people

on shore, by which means they could yield as the ship swung. Upon this rope they had got a ring, which they could by means of two smaller ropes draw forwards and backwards from the ship to the shore : to this ring they had fixed a loop, which each man put under his arms ; and by this means, and holding by the ring with his hands, he supported himself, hanging to the ring, while he was drawn to the shore by the people there ; and in this manner I saw a great many drawn on shore. But this proved a tedious work ; and though I looked at them for a long time, yet the numbers on the deck were not apparently diminished ; besides, from the motion which the ship had by rolling on the rocks, it was not possible to keep the rope equally stretched, and from this cause, as well as from the sudden rising of the waves, you would at one moment see a poor wretch hanging ten or twenty feet above the water, and the next you would lose sight of him in the foam of a wave, though some escaped better.

“But this was not a scheme which the women and many of the sick could avail themselves of.

“I observed with some admiration the behaviour of a Captain of a man-of-war, who seemed interested in the highest degree for the safety of these poor wretches. He exerted himself uncommonly, and directed others what to do on shore, and endeavoured in vain with a large speaking-trumpet to make himself heard by those on board ; but finding that nothing could be heard but the roaring of the wind

and sea, he offered anybody five guineas instantly who would suffer himself to be drawn on board with instructions to them what to do. And when he found that nobody would accept his offer, he gave an instance of the highest heroism: for he fixed the rope about himself and gave the signal to be drawn on board. He had his uniform coat on and his sword hanging at his side. I have not room to describe the particulars; but there was something grand and interesting in the thing: for as soon as they had pulled him into the wreck, he was received with three vast shouts by the people on board; and these were immediately echoed by those who lined the shore, the garrison-walls and lower batteries.

“The first thing he did was to rig out two other ropes like the first: which I saw him most active in doing with his own hands. This quickened the matter a good deal, and by this time two large open row-boats were arrived from the Dockyard, and a sloop had with difficulty worked out from Plymouth Pool. He then became active in getting out the women and the sick, who were with difficulty got into the open boats, and by them carried off to the sloop, which kept off for fear of being stove against the ship or thrown upon the rocks. He suffered but one boat to approach the ship at a time, and stood with his drawn sword to prevent too many rushing into the boat. After he had seen all the people out of the ship to about ten or fifteen, he fixed himself to the rope as before and was drawn ashore, where he was

again received with shouts. Upon my inquiry who this gallant officer was, I was informed that it was Sir Edward Pellew, whom I had heard the highest character of before, both for bravery and mercy.

“The soldiers were falling into disorder when Sir Edward went on board. Many of them were drunk, having broke into the cabin and got at the liquor. I saw him beating one with the flat of his broadsword, in order to make him give up a bundle he had made up of plunder. They had but just time to save the men, before the ship was nearly under water. I observed a poor goat and a dog amongst the crowd, when the people were somewhat thinned away. I saw the goat marching about with much unconcern; but the dog showed evident anxiety, for I saw him stretching himself out at one of the port-holes, standing partly upon the port and partly upon a gun, and looking earnestly towards the shore, where I suppose he knew his master was. All these perished soon after, as the ship was washed all over as the sea rose—she is now in pieces.”

CONVERSATION THE TWENTIETH

N.—HAVE you seen the *Life of Sir Joshua*¹ just published?

H.—No.

N.—It is all, or nearly all, taken from my account, and yet the author misrepresents or contradicts everything I say, I suppose to show that he is under no obligation to me. I cannot understand the drift of his work; nor who it is he means to please. He finds fault with Sir Joshua, among a number of other things, for not noticing Hogarth. Why, it was not his business to notice Hogarth any more than it was to notice Fielding. Both of them were great wits and describers of manners in common life, but neither of them came under the article of painting. What Hogarth had was his own, and nobody will ever have it again in the same degree. But all that did not depend on his own genius was detestable, both as to his subjects and his execution. Was Sir Joshua to recommend these as models to the student? No, we are to imitate only what is best, and that in which

¹ By Allan Cunningham. [ED.]

even failure is honourable; not that where only originality and the highest point of success can at all excuse the attempt.

Cunningham (the writer of the *Life*) pretends to cry up Hogarth as a painter; but this is not true. He moulded little figures and placed them to see how the lights fell and how the drapery came in, which gave a certain look of reality and relief; but this was not enough to give breadth or grace, and his figures look like puppets after all, or like dolls dressed up. Who would compare any of these little, miserable, deformed caricatures of men and women to the figure of St. Paul preaching at Athens? What we justly admire and emulate is that which raises human nature, not that which degrades and holds it up to scorn. We may laugh to see a person rolled in the kennel, but we are ashamed of ourselves for doing so.

We are amused with *Tom Jones*; but we rise from the perusal of *Clarissa* with higher feelings and better resolutions than we had before. St. Giles's is not the only school of art. It is nature, to be sure; but we must select nature. Ask the meanest person in the gallery at the play-house which he likes best, the tragedy or the farce? And he will tell you, without hesitation, the tragedy—and will prefer Mrs. Siddons to the most exquisite buffoon. He feels an ambition to be placed in the situations, and to be associated with the characters, described in tragedy, and none to be connected with those in a farce;

because he feels a greater sense of power and dignity in contemplating the one, and only sees his own weakness and littleness reflected and ridiculed in the other. Even the poetry, the blank verse, pleases the most illiterate, which it would not do if it were not natural.

The world do not receive monsters. This was what I used to contest with Sir Joshua. He insisted that the blank verse in tragedy was purely artificial—a thing got up for the occasion. But surely every one must feel that he delivers an important piece of information, or asks a common question in a different tone of voice. If it were not for this, the audience would laugh at the measured speech or step of a tragic actor as burlesque, just as they are inclined to do at an Opera. Old Mr. Tolcher used to say of the famous Pulteney, “My Lord Bath always speaks in blank verse!” The stately march of his ideas, no doubt, made it natural to him. Mr. Cunningham will never persuade the world that Hogarth is superior to Raphael or Reynolds. Common sense is against it. I don't know where he picked up the notion.

H.—Probably from Mr. Lamb, who endeavours to set up Hogarth as a great tragic as well as comic genius, not inferior in either respect to Shakspeare.

N.—I can't tell where he got such an opinion; but I know it is great nonsense. Cunningham gives a wrong account of an anecdote which he has taken from me. Dr. Tucker, Dean of Gloucester, had said at a meeting of the Society of Arts that “a pin-maker was

a more important member of society than Raphael." Sir Joshua had written some remark on this assertion in an old copy-book which fell into my hands, and which nobody probably ever saw but myself. Cunningham states that Sir Joshua was present when Dean Tucker made the speech at the Society, and that he immediately rose up, and with great irritation answered him on the spot, which is contrary both to the fact and to Sir Joshua's character. He would never have thought of rising to contradict any one in a public assembly for not agreeing with him on the importance of his own profession.

In one part of the new *Life*, it is said that Sir Joshua, seeing the ill-effects that Hogarth's honesty and bluntness had had upon his prospects as a portrait-painter, had learnt the art to make himself agreeable to his sitters, and to mix up the oil of flattery with his discourse as assiduously as with his colours. This is far from the truth. Sir Joshua's manners were indeed affable and obliging, but he flattered nobody; and instead of gossiping or making it his study to amuse his sitters, minded only his own business. I remember being in the next room the first time the Duchess of Cumberland came to sit, and I can vouch that scarce a word was spoken for near two hours.

Another thing remarkable to show how little Sir Joshua crouched to the Great is, that he never even gave them their proper titles. I never heard the words "*your lordship*" or "*your*

ladyship" come from his mouth; nor did he ever say *Sir* in speaking to any one but Dr. Johnson; and when he did not hear distinctly what the latter said (which often happened) he would then say, "Sir?" that he might repeat it. He was in this respect like a Quaker, not from any scruples or affectation of independence, but possibly from some awkwardness and confusion in addressing the variety of characters he met with, or at his first entrance on his profession.

His biographer is also unjust to Sir Joshua in stating that his table was scantily supplied out of penuriousness. The truth is, Sir Joshua would ask a certain number and order a dinner to be provided; and then in the course of the morning, two or three other persons would drop in, and he would say, "I have got so and so to dinner, will you join us?" which they being always ready to do, there were sometimes more guests than seats, but nobody complained of this or was unwilling to come again. If Sir Joshua had really grudged his guests, they would not have repeated their visits twice, and there would have been plenty of room and of provisions the next time. Sir Joshua never gave the smallest attention to such matters; all he cared about was his painting in the morning, and the conversation at his table, to which last he sacrificed his interest; for his associating with men like Burke, who was at that time a great oppositionist, did him no good at court. Sir Joshua was equally free from meanness or ostentation and encroachment on others; no one knew

himself better or more uniformly kept his place in society.

H.—It is a pity to mar the idea of Sir Joshua's dinner-parties, which are one of the pleasantest instances on record of a cordial intercourse between persons of distinguished pretensions of all sorts. But some people do not care what they spoil, so that they can tell disagreeable truth.

N.—In the present case there is not even that excuse. The statement answers no good end, while it throws a very unfounded slur on Sir Joshua's hospitality and love of good cheer. It is insinuated that he was sparing of his wine, which is not true. Again, I am blamed for not approving of Dr. Johnson's speech to Sir Joshua at the Miss Cottrells', when the Duchess of Argyll came in, and he thought himself neglected—"How much do you think you and I could earn in a week, if we were to work as hard as we could?" This was a rude and unmerited insult. The Miss Cottrells were the daughters of an Admiral and people of fashion, as well as the Duchess of Argyll; and they naturally enough fell into conversation about persons and things that they knew, though Dr. Johnson had not been used to hear of them. He therefore thought it affectation and insolence, whereas the vulgarity and insolence were on his own side.

If I had any fault to find with Sir Joshua, it would be that he was a very bad master in the art. Of all his pupils, I am the only one who ever did anything at all. He was like the boy teaching the other to swim.

“How do you do when you want to turn?”—“How must you do when you turn? Why, you must look that way!” Sir Joshua’s instructions amounted to little more. People talk of the instinct of animals as if a *blind reason* were an absurdity: whereas whatever men can do best, they understand and can explain least. Your son was looking at that picture of the lap-dog the other evening. There is a curious story about that. The dog was walking out with me one day, and was set upon and bit by a strange dog, for all dogs know and hate a favourite. He was a long time in recovering from the wound; and one day when Mr. P[rince] H[oare] called, he ran up to him, leaped up quite overjoyed, then lay down, began to whine, patted the place where he had been hurt with his paws, and went through the whole history of his misfortune. It was a perfect pantomime. I will not tell the story to G[odwin], for the philosopher would be jealous of the sagacity of the cur.

H.—There was Jack Spines, the racket-player: he excelled in what is called the *half-volley*. Some amateurs of the game were one day disputing what this term of art meant. Spines was appealed to. “Why, gentlemen,” says he, “I really can’t say exactly; but I should think the half-volley is something between the volley and the half-volley.” This definition was not quite the thing. The celebrated John Davies, the finest player in the world, could give no account of his proficiency that way. It is a game which no one thinks of playing without putting on a

flannel jacket ; and after you have been engaged in it for ten minutes, you are just as if you had been dipped in a mill-pond. John Davies never pulled off his coat ; and merely buttoning it that it might not be in his way, would go down into the Fives-court and play two of the best players of the day, and at the end of the match you could not perceive that a hair of his head was wet. Powell, the keeper of the court (why does not Sir B. Nash, among so many innovations, rebuild it ?) said he never seemed to follow the ball, but that it came to him—he did everything with such ease.

N.—Then every motion of that man was perfect grace : there was not a muscle in his body that did not contribute its share to the game. So, when they begin to learn the pianoforte, at first they use only the fingers, and are soon tired to death : then the muscles of the arm come into play, which relieves them a little ; and at last the whole frame is called into action, so as to produce the effect with entire ease and gracefulness. It is the same in everything : and he is indeed a poor creature who cannot do more, from habit or natural genius, than he can give any rational account of.

(Some remarks having been made on the foregoing conversation, Mr. Northcote, the next time I saw him, took up the subject nearly as follows.)

N.—The newspaper critic asks with an air of triumph as if he had found a *mare's nest*, “What ! are *Sophia Western* and *Allworthy*, St. Giles's ?” Why,

they are the very ones : they are *Tower-stamp* ! *Bliffl*, and *Black George*, and *Square* are not—they have some sense and spirit in them and are so far redeemed, for Fielding put his own cleverness and ingenuity into them ; but as to his refined characters, they are an essence of vulgarity and insipidity. *Sophia* is a poor doll ; and as to *Allworthy* he has not the soul of a goose : and how does he behave to the young man that he has brought up and pampered with the expectations of a fortune and of being a fine gentleman ? Does he not turn him out to starve or rob on the highway without the shadow of an excuse, on a mere maudlin sermonising pretext of morality, and with as little generosity as principle ? No, Fielding did not know what virtue or refinement meant. As Richardson said, he should have thought his books were written by an ostler ; or Sir John Hawkins has expressed it still better, that the virtues of his heroes are the virtues of dogs and horses—he does not go beyond that—nor indeed so far, for his *Tom Jones* is not so good as Lord Byron's Newfoundland dog. I have known Newfoundland dogs with twenty times his understanding and good nature.

That is where Richardson has the advantage over Fielding—the virtues of *his* characters are not the virtues of animals—*Clarissa* holds her head in the skies, a “bright particular star” ; for whatever may be said, we have such *ideas*—and thanks to those who sustain and nourish them, and woe to those critics who would confound them with the dirt under

our feet and Grub Street jargon! No, that is what we want—to have the line made as black and as broad as possible that separates what we have in common with the animals from what we *pretend* (at least) to have above them. That is where the newspaper critic is wrong in saying that the blackguard in the play is equal to Mrs. Siddons. No, he is not equal to Mrs. Siddons, any more than a baited bull or an over-drove ox is equal to Mrs. Siddons. There is the same animal fury in *Tyke* that there is in the maddened brute, with the same want of any ideas beyond himself and his own mechanical and coarse impulses—it is the lowest stage of human capacity and feeling violently acted upon by circumstances. *Lady Macbeth*, if she is the demon, is not the brute; she has the intellectual part, and is hurried away no less by the violence of her will than by a wide scope of imagination and a lofty ambition.

Take away all dignity and grandeur from poetry and art, and you make Emery equal to Mrs. Siddons, and Hogarth to Raphael, but not else. Emery's *Tyke*, in his extremity, calls for brandy—Mrs. Siddons does not, like *Queen Dollalolla*, call for a glass of gin. Why not? Gin is as natural a drink as poison; but if Capella Bianca, instead of swallowing the poison herself, when she found it was not given to her enemy, had merely got drunk for spite, in the manner of Hogarth's heroines, she would not have been recorded in history. There is then a foundation for the distinction between the heroic and the natural, which I

am not bound to explain any more than I am to account why black is not white.

H.—If Emery is equal to Mrs. Siddons, Morton is equal to Shakspeare; though it would be difficult to bring such persons to that conclusion.

N.—I'll tell you why Emery is not equal to Mrs. Siddons; there are a thousand Emerys to one Mrs. Siddons, the stage is always full of six or seven comic actors at a time, so that you cannot tell which is best, Emery, Fawcett, Munden, Lewis—but in my time I have seen but Garrick and Mrs. Siddons, who have left a gap behind them that I shall not live to see filled up. Emery is the first blackguard or stage-coach driver you see in a *row* in the street; but if you had not seen Mrs. Siddons, you could have no idea of her; nor can you convey it to any one who has not. She was like a preternatural being descended to the earth. I cannot say Sir Joshua has done her justice. I regret Mrs. Abington too—she was the Grosvenor Square of comedy, if you please. I am glad that Hogarth did not paint her; it would have been a thing to spit upon.

If the correspondent of the newspaper wants to know where *my* Grosvenor Square of art is, he'll find it in the *Provoked Husband*, in *Lord* and *Lady Towneley*, not in the *History of a Foundling*, or in the pompous, swag-bellied peer, with his dangling pedigree, or his gawky son-in-law, or his dawdling *malkin* of a wife from the city, playing with the ring like an idiot, in the *Mariage à la Mode!* There may be vice and folly

enough in Vanbrugh's scenes ; but it is not the vice of St. Giles's, it does not savour of the kennel. Not that I would have my interrogator suppose that I think all is vice in St. Giles's. On the contrary, I could find at this moment instances of more virtue, refinement, sense, and beauty there, than there are in his *Sophy*. No, nature is the same everywhere ; there are as many handsome children born in St. Giles's as in Grosvenor Square ; but the same care is not taken of them ; and in general they grow up greater beauties in the one than the other. A child in St. Giles's is left to run wild ; it thrusts its fingers into its mouth or pulls its nose about ; but if a child of people of fashion play any tricks of this kind, it is told immediately, "You must not do this, unless you would have your mouth reach from ear to ear ; you must not say that ; you must not sit in such a manner, or you'll grow double."

This seems like art ; but it is only giving nature fair play. No one was allowed to touch the Princess Charlotte when a child. She was taken care of like something precious. The sister of the Duke of ——— had her nose broke when a child in a quarrel with her sister, who flung a teabasin at her ; but all the doctors were immediately called in, and every remedy was applied, so that when she grew up, there was no appearance of the accident left. If the same thing had happened to a poor child, she would have carried the marks of it to her grave. So you see a number of crooked people and twisted

legs among the lower classes. This was what made Lord Byron so mad—that he had mis-shapen feet. Don't you think so?

H.—Yes; T[om] M[oore] told a person I know that that was the cause of all his misanthropy—he wanted to be an *Adonis*, and could not.

N.—Ay, and of his genius too; it made him write verses in revenge. There is no knowing the effect of such sort of things, of defects we wish to balance. Do you suppose we owe nothing to Pope's deformity? He said to himself, "If my person be crooked, my verses shall be strait." I myself have felt this in passing along the street, when I have heard rude remarks made on my personal appearance. I then go home and paint: but I should not do this, if I thought all that there is in art was contained in Hogarth—I should then feel neither pride nor consolation in it.

But if I thought, instead of his doll-like figures cut in two with their insipid, dough-baked faces, I should do something like Sir Joshua's *Iphigene*, with all that delights the sense in richness of colour and luxuriance of form; or instead of the women spouting the liquor in one another's faces, in the *Rake's Progress*, I could give the purity, and grace, and real elegance (appearing under all the encumbrance of the fashionable dresses of the day) of Lady Sarah Bunbury or of the Miss Hornecks, sacrificing to the Graces, or of Lady Essex, with her long waist and ruffles, but looking a pattern of the female char-

acter in all its relations, and breathing dignity and virtue, then I should think this an object worth living for ; or (as you have expressed it very properly) should even be proud of having failed.

This is the opinion the world have always entertained of the matter. Sir Joshua's name is repeated with more respect than Hogarth's. It is not for his talents, but for his taste and the direction of them. In meeting Sir Joshua (merely from a knowledge of his works) you would expect to meet a gentleman—not so of Hogarth. And yet Sir Joshua's claims and possessions in art were not of the highest order.

H.—But he was decent, and did not profess the arts and accomplishments of a Merry-Andrew.

N.—I assure you, it was not for want for ability either. When he was young, he did a number of caricatures of different persons, and could have got any price for them. But he found it necessary to give up the practice. Leonardo da Vinci, a mighty man, and who had titles manifold, had a great turn for drawing laughable and grotesque likenesses of his acquaintances ; but he threw them all in the fire. It was to him a kind of profanation of the art. Sir Joshua would almost as soon have forged as he would have set his name to a caricature.

Gilray (whom you speak of) was eminent in this way ; but he had other talents as well. In the *Embassy to China*, he has drawn the Emperor of China a complete Eastern voluptuary, fat and

supine, with all the effects of climate and situation evident upon his person, and Lord Macartney is an elegant youth, a real *Apollo*; then, indeed, come *Punch* and the puppet-show after him, to throw the whole into ridicule. In the *Revolutionists' Jolly-boat*, after the Opposition were defeated, he has placed Fox, and Sheridan, and the rest escaping from the wreck: Dante could not have described them as looking more sullen and gloomy. He was a great man in his way. Why does not Mr. Lamb write an essay on the *Twopenny Whist*? Yet it was against his conscience, for he had been on the other side, and was bought over. The minister sent to ask him to do *them* half a dozen at a certain price, which he agreed to, and took them to the treasury; but there being some demur about the payment, he took them back with some saucy reply. He had not been long at home, before a messenger was sent after him with the money.

CONVERSATION THE TWENTY-FIRST

N.—G[ODWIN] and I had a dispute lately about the capacity of animals. He appeared to consider them as little better than machines. He made it the distinguishing mark of superiority in man that he is the only animal that can transmit his thoughts to future generations. “Yes,” I said, “for future generations to take no sort of notice of them.” I allowed that there were a few extraordinary geniuses that every one must look up to—and I mentioned the names of Shakspeare and Dryden. But he would not hear of Dryden, and began to pull him in pieces immediately. “Why, then,” I answered, “if you cannot agree among yourselves even with respect to four or five of the most eminent, how can there be the vast and overwhelming superiority you pretend to?” I observed that instinct in animals answered very much to what we call genius. I spoke of the wonderful powers of smell, and the sagacity of dogs, and the memory shown by horses in finding a road that they have once travelled; but I made no way with G[odwin]; he still went back to *Lear* and *Othello*.

H.—I think he was so far right ; for as this is what he understands best and has to imitate, it is fit he should admire and dwell upon it most. He cannot acquire the smell of the dog or the sagacity of the horse, and therefore it is of no use to think about them ; but he may, by dint of study and emulation, become a better poet or philosopher. The question is not merely what is best in itself (of that we are hardly judges), but what sort of excellence we understand best and can make our own ; for otherwise, in affecting to admire we know not what, we may admire a nonentity or a deformity. Abraham Tucker has remarked very well on this subject, that a swine wallowing in the mire may, for what he can tell, be as happy as a philosopher in writing an essay, but that is no reason why he (the philosopher) should exchange occupations or tastes with the brute, unless he could first exchange *natures*.

We may suspend our judgments in such cases as a matter of speculation or conjecture, but that is different from the habitual or practical feeling. So I remember W—— being nettled at D——¹ (who affected a fashionable taste) for saying, on coming out of the Marquis of Stafford's gallery, "A very noble art, very superior to poetry !" If it were so, W—— observed, he could know nothing about it, who had never seen any fine pictures before. It was like an European adventurer saying to an

¹ These names may possibly be those of Wordsworth and De Quincey. [ED.]

African chieftain, "A very fine boy, sir, your black son—very superior to my white one!" This is mere affectation; we might as well pretend to be thrown into rapture by a poem written in a language we are not acquainted with. We may notwithstanding believe that it is very fine, and have no wish to hang up the writer, because he is not an Englishman. A spider may be a greater mechanic than Watt or Arkwright; but the effects are not brought home to us in the same manner, and we cannot help estimating the cause by the effect.

A friend of mine teases me with questions, "Which was the greatest man, Sir Isaac Newton or a first-rate chess-player?" It refers itself to the head of the *Illustrious Obscure*. A club of chess-players might give it in favour of the *Great Unknown*; but all the rest of the world, who have heard of the one and not of the other, will give it against him. We cannot set aside those prejudices which are founded on the limitation of our faculties or the constitution of society; only that we need not lay them down as abstract or demonstrable truths. It is there the bigotry and error begin. The language of taste and moderation is, *I prefer this, because it is best to me*; the language of dogmatism and intolerance is, *Because I prefer it, it is best in itself, and I will allow no one else to be of a different opinion*.

N.—I find in the last conversation I saw, you make me an admirer of Fielding, and so I am; but I find great fault with him too. I grant he is one

of those writers that I remember; he stamps his characters, whether good or bad, on the reader's mind. This is more than I can say of every one. For instance, when G[odwin] plagues me about my not having sufficient admiration of W[ordsworth]'s poetry, the answer I give is, that it is not my fault, for I have utterly forgotten it; it seemed to me like the ravellings of poetry. But to say nothing of Fielding's immorality, and his fancying himself a fine gentleman in the midst of all his coarseness, he has oftener described *habits* than *character*. For example, *Western* is no character; it is merely the language, manners, and pursuits of the country squire of that day; and the proof of this is, that there is no 'Squire *Western* now. Manners and customs wear out, but characters last for ever. I remember making this remark to Holcroft, and he asked me, What was the difference? Are you not surprised at that?

H.—Not in him. If you mentioned the word *character*, he stopped you short by saying, that it was merely the difference of circumstances; or if you hinted at the difference of natural capacity, he said, "Then, sir, you must believe in *innate ideas*." He surrendered his own feelings and better judgment to a set of cant-phrases, called *the modern philosophy*.

N.—I need not explain the difference to you. Character is the groundwork, the natural *stamina* of the mind, on which circumstances only act. You see it in St. Giles's—there are characters there that in

the midst of filth, and vice, and ignorance retain some traces of their original goodness, and struggle with their situation to the last ; as in *St. James's*, you will find wretches that would disgrace a halter. *Gil Blas* has character.

H.—I thought he only gave professions and classes, players, footmen, sharpers, courtesans, but not the individual, as Fielding often does, though we should strip *Western* of his scarlet hunting-dress and jockey phrases. There is *Square*, *Blifil*, *Black George*, *Mrs. Fitzpatrick*, *Parson Adams* ; and a still greater cluster of them in the one that is least read, the noble peer, the lodging-house keeper, *Mrs. Bennet*, and *Colonel Bath*.

N.—You mean *Amelia*. I have not read that, but will get it. I allow in part what you say ; but in the best there is something too local and belonging to the time. But what I chiefly object to in Fielding is his conceit, his consciousness of what he is doing, his everlasting recommendation and puffing of his own wit and sagacity. His introductory chapters make me sick.

H.—Why, perhaps, Fielding is to be excused as a disappointed man. All his success was late in life, for he died in 1754 ; and *Joseph Andrews* (the first work of his that was popular) was published in 1748.¹ All the rest of his life he had been drudging for the booksellers, or bringing out unsuccessful comedies.

¹ All this is founded on a slip of Hazlitt's memory, for *Joseph Andrews* appeared in 1742. [ED.]

He probably anticipated the same result in his novels, and wished to bespeak the favour of the reader by putting himself too much forward. His prefaces are like Ben Jonson's prologues, and from the same cause, mortified vanity; though it seems odd to say so at present, after the run his writings have had; but he could not foresee that, and only lived a short time to witness it.

N.—I can bear anything but that conscious look—it is to me like the lump of soot in the broth, that spoils the whole mess. Fielding was one of the swaggerers.

H.—But he had much to boast of.

N.—He certainly was not idle in his time. Idleness would have ruined a greater man.

H.—Then you do not agree to a maxim I have sometimes thought might be laid down, that no one is idle who can do anything?

N.—No, certainly.

H.—I conceive it may be illustrated from Wilson, who was charged with idleness, and who, after painting a little, used to say, as soon as any friend dropped in, "Now let us go somewhere,"—meaning to the alehouse. All that Wilson could do, he did, and that finely too, with a few well-disposed masses and strokes of the pencil; but he could not finish, or he would have stayed within all the morning to work up his pictures to the perfection of Claude's. He thought it better to go to the alehouse than to spoil what he had already done. I have in my own

mind made this excuse for ——,¹ that he could only make a first sketch, and was obliged to lose the greatest part of his time in waiting for *windfalls* of heads and studies. I have sat to him twice, and each time I offered to come again, and he said he would let me know, but I heard no more of it. The sketch went as it was—of course in a very unfinished state.

N.—But he might have remedied this by diligence and practice.

H.—I do not know that he could : one might say that there is the same abruptness and crudity in his character throughout, in his conversation, his walk, and look—great force and spirit, but neither softness nor refinement.

N.—If he had more humility, he might have seen all that in the works of others, and have strove to imitate it.

H.—What I mean is, that it was his not having the sense of these refinements in himself that prevented his perceiving them in others, or taking pains to supply a defect to which he was blind.

N.—I do not think that under any circumstances he would have made a Raphael. But your reasoning goes too much to what Dr. Johnson ridiculed in poetry—fits of inspiration, and a greater flow of ideas in the autumn than the spring. Sir Joshua used to work at all times, whether he was in the humour or not.

¹ The reference is, perhaps, to Abraham Wivell. [Ed.]

H.—And so would every one else with his motives and ability to excel. Lawyers without fees are accused of idleness, but this goes off when the briefs pour in.

N.—Did you see the newspaper accounts of the election of the new Pope? It appears that nothing could exceed his repugnance to be chosen. He begged and even wept to be let off. You are to consider, he is an old man labouring under a mortal disease (which is one circumstance that led to his elevation)—to be taken from the situation of Cardinal (in itself a very enviable one) and thrust violently into a mass of business, of questions and cabals which will distract him, and where he can get no thanks and may incur every kind of odium. It is true, he has an opportunity of making the fortunes of his family; and if he prefers them to himself, it is all very well, but not else. To persons of a restless and aspiring turn of mind, ambition and grandeur are very fine things, but to others they are the most intolerable tax.

There is our own King—there is no conceiving the punishment that those processions and public show-days are to him—and then as to all the pomp and glitter that we so much admire, it is to those who are accustomed to it and who see behind the curtain, like so much cast-off rags and tinsel or Monmouth Street finery. They hold it in inconceivable scorn, and yet they can hardly do without it, from the slavery of habit. Then the time of such people is never their own—they are always performing a part (and gener-

ally a forced and irksome one) in what no way interests or concerns them.

The late King, to whom rank was a real drudgery, used to stand buried in a pile of papers, so that you could not see those on the other side of the table, which he had merely to sign. It is no wonder kings are sometimes seen to retire to a monastery where religion leaves this asylum open to them, or are glad to return to their shepherd's crook again. No situation can boast of complete ease or freedom; and even *that* would have its disadvantages. And then again, look at those labourers at the top of the house yonder, working from morning till night, and exposed to all weathers for a bare pittance, without hope to sweeten their toil, and driven on by hunger and necessity!

When we turn to others, whether those above or below us, we have little reason to be dissatisfied with our own situation in life. But in all cases it is necessary to employ means to ends, be the object what it may; and where the first have not been taken, it is both unjust and foolish to repine at the want of success. The common expression, "Fortune's Fools," may seem to convey a slur on the order of Providence; but it rather shows the equality of its distributions. Are the men of capacity to have all the good things to themselves? They are proud of their supposed superiority: why are they not contented with it? If a fool is not to grow rich, the next thing would be, that none but men of genius

should have a coat to their backs, or be thought fit to live. If it were left to them to provide food or clothes, they would have none for themselves. It is urged as a striking inequality that enterprising manufacturers, for instance, should rise to great wealth and honours, while thousands of their dependants are labouring hard at one or two shillings a day : but we are to recollect that if it had not been for men like these, the working classes would have been perishing for want : they collect the others together, give a direction and find a vent for their industry, and may be said to exercise a part of *sovereign* capacity. Everything has its place and due subordination. If authors had the direction of the world, nothing would be left standing but printing-presses.

N.—What do you think of that portrait ?

H.—It is very ladylike, and, I should imagine, a good likeness.

N.—J—— said I might go on painting yet—he saw no falling off. *They* are pleased with it. I have painted almost the whole family, and the girls would let their mother sit to nobody else. But Lord ! everything one can do seems to fall so short of nature : whether it is the want of skill or the imperfection of the art that cannot give the successive movements of expression and changes of countenance, I am always ready to beg pardon of my sitters after I have done, and to say I hope they'll excuse it. The more one knows of the art, and indeed the better one can do, the less one is satisfied. This made Titian write

under his pictures *faciebat*, signifying that they were only in progress.

I remember Burke came in one day when Sir Joshua had been painting one of the Lennoxes; he was quite struck with the beauty of the performance, and said he hoped Sir Joshua would not touch it again: to which the latter replied, that if he had seen the original, he would have thought little of the picture, and that there was a *look* which it was hardly in the power of art to give. No! all we can do is to produce something that makes a distant approach to nature, and that serves as a faint relic of the individual. A portrait is only a little better memorial than the parings of the nails or a lock of the hair.

H.—Who is it?

N.—It is a Lady W——: you have heard me speak of her before. She is a person of great sense and spirit, and combines very opposite qualities from a sort of natural strength of character. She has shown the greatest feeling and firmness united: no one can have more tenderness in her domestic connections, and yet she has borne the loss of some of them with exemplary fortitude. Perhaps, the one is a consequence of the other; for where the attachment or even the regret is left, all is not lost. The mind has still a link to connect it with the beloved object. She has no affectation; and therefore yields to unavoidable circumstances as they arise. Inconsolable grief is often mere cant, and a trick to impose

on ourselves and others. People of any real strength of character are seldom affected: those who have not the clue of their own feelings to guide them, do not know what to do, and study only how to produce an effect. I recollect one of the Miss B[erry]s, Lord Orford's favourites, whom I met with at a party formerly, using the expression, "That seal of mediocrity, affectation!" Don't you think this striking?

H.—Yes; but not quite free from the vice it describes.

N.—Oh! they had plenty of that: they were regular *blue-stockings*, I assure you; or they would not have been so entirely to his lordship's taste, who was a mighty coxcomb. But there is none of that in the person I have been speaking of: she has very delightful, genteel, easy manners.

H.—That is the only thing I envy in people in that class.

N.—But you are not to suppose they all have it: it is only those who are born with it, and who would have had it in a less degree in every situation of life. Vulgarity is the growth of courts as well as of the hovel. We may be deceived by a certain artificial or conventional manner in persons of rank and fashion; but they themselves see plainly enough into the natural character. I remember Lady W—— told me, as an instance to this purpose, that when she was a girl, she and her sister were introduced at court; and it was then the fashion to stand in a circle, and the

Queen came round and spoke to the different persons in turn. There was some high lady who came in after them, and pushed rudely into the circle so as to get before them. But the Queen, who saw the circumstance, went up and spoke to them first, and then passed on (as a just punishment) without taking any notice whatever of the forward intruder. I forget how it arose the other day, but she asked me, "Pray, Mr. Northcote, is Discretion reckoned one of the cardinal virtues?"—"No," I said, "it is not one of them, for it is all!" If we had discretion at all times, we should never do wrong: but we are taken off our guard by being thrown into new and difficult situations, and have not time to weigh the consequences or to summon resolution to our aid. That is what Opie used to say when he had been engaged in an argument overnight, what excellent answers he could give the next day—and was vexed with himself for not having thought of them. No! if we had sufficient presence of mind to foresee the consequences of our actions on the spot, we should very rarely have occasion to repent of them afterwards.

H.—You put me in mind of Cicero's account of the cardinal virtues, in his *Offices*, who makes them out to be four; and then says they are all referable to the first, which is *Prudence*.

N.—Ay; do you recollect what they are?

H.—Prudence, Temperance, Justice, and Fortitude.

N.—They are too much alike. The most distinct is Fortitude.

H.—I never could make much of Cicero, except his two treatises on Friendship and Old Age, which are most amiable gossiping. I see that Canning borrowed his tautology from Cicero, who runs on with such expressions as “I will *bear*, I will *suffer*, I will *endure* any extremity.” This is bad enough in the original : it is inexcusable in the copy. Cicero’s style, however, answered to the elegance of his finely-turned features ; and in his long, graceful neck you may trace his winding and involuted periods.

N.—Do you believe in that sort of stuff?

H.—Not more than I can help.

CONVERSATION THE TWENTY-SECOND

N.—I OUGHT to cross myself like the Catholics, when I see you. You terrify me by repeating what I say. But I see you have regulated yourself. There is nothing personally offensive, except what relates to Sir Walter. You make him swear too, which he did not do. He would never use the expression *Egad*. These little things mark the gentleman. I am afraid, if he sees it, he'll say I am a babbler. That is what they dread so at court, that the least word should transpire.

H.—They may have their reasons for caution. At least, they can gain nothing, and might possibly lose equally by truth or falsehood, as it must be difficult to convey an adequate idea of royalty. But authors are glad to be talked about. If Sir W. Scott has an objection to having his name mentioned, he is singularly unlucky. Enough was said in his praise; and I do not believe he is captious. I fancy he *takes the rough with the smooth*. I did not well know what to do. You seemed to express a wish that the conversations should proceed, and yet you are startled at

particular phrases, or I would have brought you what I had done to show you. I thought it best to take my chance of the general impression.

N.—Why, if kept to be published as a diary after my death, they might do: nobody could then come to ask me questions about them. But I cannot say they appear very striking to me. One reason may be, what I observe myself cannot be very new to me. If others are pleased, they are the best judges. It seems very odd that you who are acquainted with some of the greatest authors of the day cannot find anything of theirs worth setting down.

H.—That by no means pleases them. I understand G[odwin] is angry at the liberty I take with you. He is quite safe in this respect. I might answer him much in the manner of the fellow in the *Country Girl* when his friend introduces his mistress and he salutes her, “Why, I suppose if I were to introduce my grandmother to you——”—“Sir,” replies the other, “I should treat her with the utmost respect.” So I shall never think of repeating any of G[odwin]’s conversations. My indifference may arise in part, as you say, from their not being very new to me. G[odwin] might, I daresay, argue very well on the doctrine of philosophical necessity or many other questions; but then I have read all this before in Hume or other writers, and I am very little edified, because I have myself had access to the same sources that he has drawn from. But you, as an artist, have been pushed into an intercourse with the world as

well as an observation of nature; and combine a sufficient knowledge of general subjects with living illustrations of them. I do not like the conversation of mere men of the world or anecdote-mongers, for there is nothing to bind it together, and the other sort is pedantic and tiresome from repetition, so that there is nobody but you I can come to.

N.—You do not go enough into society, or you would be cured of what I cannot help regarding as a whim. You would there find many people of sense and information whose names you never heard of. It is not those who have made most noise in the world who are persons of the greatest general capacity. It is the making the most of a little, or the being determined to get before others in some one thing (perhaps for want of other recommendations) that brings men into notice. Individuals gain a reputation as they make a fortune, by application and by having set their minds upon it. But you have set out (like other people brought up among books) with such exclusive notions of authors and literary fame, that if you find the least glimmering of common sense out of this pale, you think it a prodigy, and run into the opposite extreme. I do not say that you have not a perception of character, or have not thought as far as you have observed; but you have not had the opportunities. You turn your back on the world, and fancy that they turn their backs on you. This is a very dangerous principle. You become reckless of consequences.

It leads to an abandonment of character. By setting the opinion of others at defiance, you lose your self-respect. It is of no use that you still say, you will do what is right; your passions usurp the place of reason, and whisper you, that whatever you are bent upon doing is right. You cannot put this deception on the public, however false or prejudiced their standard may be; and the opinion of the world, therefore, acts as a seasonable check upon wilfulness and eccentricity.

H.—What you have stated is the best excuse I could make for my own faults or blunders. When one is found fault with for nothing, or for doing one's best, one is apt to give the world their revenge. All the former part of my life I was treated as a cipher; and since I have got into notice, I have been set upon as a wild beast. When this is the case, and you can expect as little justice as candour, you naturally in self-defence take refuge in a sort of misanthropy and cynical contempt for mankind. One is disposed to humour them, and to furnish them with some ground for their idle and malevolent censures.

N.—But you should not. If you do nothing to confirm them in their first prejudices, they will come round in time. They are *slow* to admit claims, because they are not *sure* of their validity; and they thwart and cross-examine you to try what temper you are made of. Without some such ordeal or difficulty thrown in the way, every upstart and

pretender must be swallowed whole. That would never do. But if you have patience to stand the test, justice is rendered at last, and you are stamped for as much as you are worth. You certainly have not spared others: why should you expect nothing but "the milk of human kindness"?

Look to those men behind you (*a collection of portraits on the same frame*)—there is Pope and Dryden—did they fare better than living authors? Had not Dryden his Shadwell, and Pope his Dennis, who fretted him to a shadow, and galled him almost to death? There was Dr. Johnson, who in his writings was a pattern of wisdom and morality—he declared that he had been hunted down as if he had been the great enemy of mankind. But he had strength of mind to look down upon it. Not to do this, is either infirmity of temper, or shows a conscious want of any claims that are worth carrying up to a higher tribunal than the cabal and clamour of the moment.

Sir Joshua always despised malicious reports; he knew they would blow over: at the same time, he as little regarded exaggerated praise. Nothing you could say had any effect, if he was not satisfied with himself. He had a great game to play, and only looked to the result. He had studied himself thoroughly; and, besides, had great equanimity of temper, which, to be sure, it is difficult to acquire, if it is not natural. You have two faults: one is a *feud* or quarrel with the world, which makes you despair,

and prevents you taking all the pains you might: the other is a carelessness and mismanagement, which makes you throw away the little you actually do, and brings you into difficulties that way. Sir Joshua used to say it was as wrong for a man to think too little as too much of himself: if the one ran him into extravagance and presumption, the other sank him in sloth and insignificance. You see the same thing in horses: if they cannot stir a load at the first effort, they give it up as a hopeless task; and nothing can rouse them from their sluggish obstinacy but blows and ill-treatment.

H.—I confess all this, but I hardly know how to remedy it; nor do I feel any strong inducement. Taking one thing with another, I have no great cause to complain. If I had been a merchant, a bookseller, or the proprietor of a newspaper, instead of what I am, I might have had more money or possessed a town and country house, instead of lodging in a first or second floor, as it may happen. But what then? I see how the man of business and fortune passes his time. He is up and in the city by eight, swallows his breakfast in haste, attends a meeting of creditors, must read Lloyd's lists, consult the price of consols, study the markets, look into his accounts, pay his workmen, and superintend his clerks: he has hardly a minute in the day to himself, and perhaps in the four-and-twenty hours does not do a single thing that he would do if he could help it.

Surely, this sacrifice of time and inclination

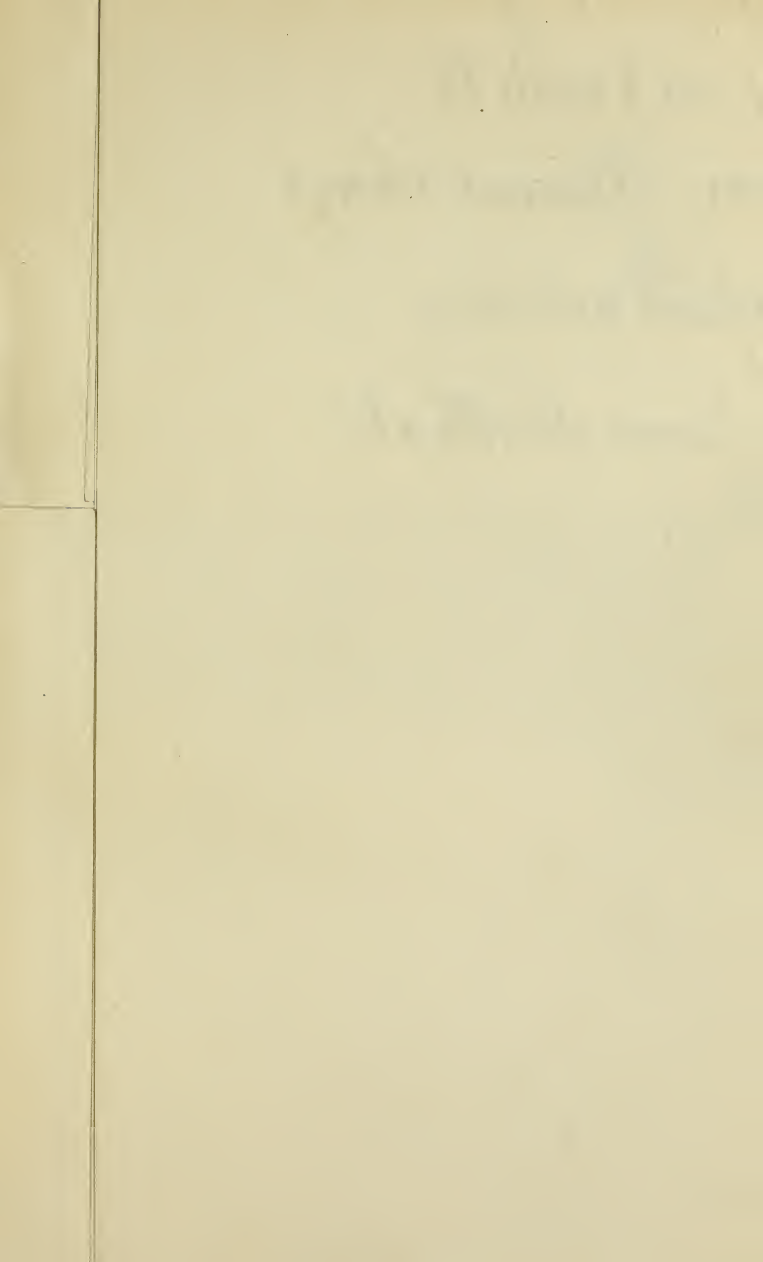
requires some compensation, which it meets with. But how am I entitled to make my fortune (which cannot be done without all this anxiety and drudgery) who do hardly anything at all, and never anything but what I like to do? I rise when I please, breakfast *at length*, write what comes into my head, and after taking a mutton-chop and a dish of strong tea, go to the play, and thus my time passes. Mr. — has no time to go to the play. It was but the other day that I had to get up a little earlier than usual to go into the city about some money transaction, which appeared to me a prodigious hardship: if so, it was plain that I must lead a tolerably easy life: nor should I object to passing mine over again.

Till I was twenty, I had no idea of anything but books, and thought everything else was worthless and mechanical. The having to study painting about this time, and finding the difficulties and beauties it unfolded, opened a new field to me, and I began to conclude that there might be a number of "other things between heaven and earth that were never dreamt of in my philosophy." Ask G[odwin] or any other literary man who has never been taken out of the leading-strings of learning, and you will perceive that they hold for a settled truth that the universe is built of words.

G[odwin] has no interest but in literary fame, of which he is a worshipper: he cannot believe that any one is clever, or has even common sense, who has not written a book. If you talk to him

of Italian cities, where great poets and patriots lived, he heaves a sigh; and if I were possessed of a fortune, he should go and visit the house where Galileo lived or the tower where Ugolino was imprisoned. He can see with the eyes of his mind. To all else he is marble. It is like speaking to him of the objects of a *sixth sense*; every other language seems dumb and inarticulate.

THE END



To

Richard Bentley Esq^r

New Burlington Street

My Dear Friend

To pray let the Bearer of this note have
my Volumes of the life of Sir Joshua Reynolds
in which are my manuscripts, as I wish to
ask a friends advice upon them. I remain always

Dear Sir

your sincere friend and very
humble servant

James Northcote

Angyll place

March 24. 1831.

To Richard Bentley Esq.

17

84-824040

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